

# Building Baby's Brain: Is Breast Milk Best?

The University of Georgia/College of Family and Consumer Sciences

Deciding how to feed your baby is one of the most important decisions you will make during your pregnancy. The first year of your baby's life is a time of rapid growth. Most babies triple their birth weight during the first year!

During the first year of life, the brain is growing rapidly as well – the size of the head increases by 4-5 inches. The brain and nervous system continue to develop until about the age of three. That's why it's important to make sure your baby gets the nourishment he needs to develop to his fullest potential.

*Average girls reach about half of their adult height by the age of 18 months; boys by 24 months. Until the age of 3, children should be weighed and measured every 6 months by a health professional. Ask to see your baby's growth chart when you go for check-ups.*

## Is breast milk best?

Breast-feeding is the natural way to feed your baby. Breast milk has all the nutrients your baby needs in the right amounts. It also has antibodies from your body which will help keep your baby from getting certain types of illnesses. For example, breast-fed babies get fewer ear and respiratory infections. A baby who is sick less often is better able to learn. Breast milk provides everything most babies need to build a healthy brain and grow properly for the first six months of life.

## Ideally, how long should I breast-feed?

For the first six months of life, breast milk provides all of the nutrients a baby needs. After that, solid foods are introduced. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, it is ideal to breast-feed until the baby is at least 12 months old.

*"There is no connection between consumption of solid foods (including cereal in a bottle) and improved sleep patterns in infants." The Yale Guide to Children's Nutrition*

## Is it worth it to breast-feed if I can only do it for a short time?

Absolutely! The first milk your body produces is the colostrum. It is especially high in the antibodies which help keep your baby from getting sick. Breast-feeding when your baby is first born is a great idea, even if you breast-feed for fewer than 12 months.

## Can I combine breast-feeding and bottle-feeding?

Breast-feeding doesn't have to be "all or nothing." Some mothers find that breast-feeding once or twice a day, with bottle-feedings in between, fits into their schedules better than breast-feeding exclusively. Wait to do this until the baby is at least 3-4 weeks old. This will allow enough time for your milk supply to become established and the baby to get used to a regular breast feeding routine.

**“Breast milk has all the nutrients your baby needs in the right amounts.”**

Supported by the University of Georgia College of Family and Consumer Sciences  
"Strengthening Georgia Families and Communities" Initiative.



Bottles should contain iron-fortified infant formula or breast milk. Be aware that the more formula the baby eats, the less breast milk he will want and the less milk your body will produce.

### **Is there a difference in intelligence between breast-fed and formula-fed babies?**

There is no way to know whether a baby will have a higher IQ if he is breast-fed. There are many intelligent people in the world who were fed infant formula, and there is no way to know whether they would have been even smarter if they had been breast-fed. Breast milk does contain long-chain poly-unsaturated fatty acids, which are important in brain development, particularly the brain development of pre-term babies. Infant formula doesn't contain these fatty acids.

### **Tips for Building Baby's Brain**

Whether you breast-feed or bottle-feed your baby, make feeding time a special time! Research shows that you can enhance your baby's brain development. Here are some ways to do this:

- Talk to your baby. Babies whose parents talk to them often have larger vocabularies than other children.
- Hold your baby when feeding him. The baby's vision is most clear at about 10 inches – the distance between your eyes and hers when feeding.
- Respond to your baby's signals. Babies who turn away from the breast or bottle may not be hungry. Your baby will communicate with you even before he can talk!
- Hold the bottle upright when feeding – this helps prevent ear infections which could limit your baby's hearing and ability to learn.
- Hug and cuddle your baby. This helps your baby feel secure and leads to healthy psycho-social development.

### **Where Can I Get More Information?**

Contact your local Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent, health-care provider, local health

department, or area hospital for more information on breast-feeding. In Georgia, contact your County Extension Agent for these and other helpful publications:

- Helpful Hints for Breast-feeding (PA-F-624)
- Feeding Infants and Children (PA-F-625)
- Food Guide Pyramid (A Guide for Healthy Eating)

### **Selected References:**

- American Academy of Pediatrics. (1998). *Pediatric Nutrition Handbook, Fourth Edition*. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics.
- Dobbing, J., Ed. (1997). *Developing Brain and Behaviour: The Role of Lipids in Infant Formula*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Shore, R. (1997). *Rethinking the brain: New insights into early development*. New York: Families and Work Institute.
- Skinner, J. D., et al. "Mealtime Communication Patterns of Infants from 2 to 24 Months of Age." *Journal of Nutrition Education*. 30:1, 8-16.
- Tamborlane, W. V., Ed. (1997). *The Yale Guide to Children's Nutrition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Worthington-Roberts, B. S. & Williams, S. R. (1996). *Nutrition Throughout the Life Cycle. Third Edition*. St. Louis: Mosby.

Written by:

*Gail M. Hanula, RD, LD, EdS*  
*Nutrition and EFNEP Specialist*  
*Department of Foods and Nutrition*

**September, 1998**

**Publication No. FACS 01-8**

**<http://www.fcs.uga.edu/outreach>**

