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Infant Feeding in Early Care and Education Settings

DID YOU KNOW

- Mother's milk or formula provides all the liquid an infant needs.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that breast milk or formula should be your child's sole nutritional source for about the first six months, and the major source of nutrition throughout the first twelve months.
- When a baby is hungry, he or she will give signs like wriggling, opening his/her mouth, or sticking out his/her tongue. Feeding before the baby cries will prevent crying. Crying is a late sign of hunger.
- Cereal in a bottle may upset the infants' tummy. Don't feed cereal until the baby can eat it from a spoon.
- Propping a bottle is not safe for reasons of health and safety.
- Starting foods before 6 months can increase their chances of allergies down the road.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Promote healthy infant nutrition in your center:

- Create a center policy or guidelines for staff and families to follow in order to provide consistent and appropriate food experiences about infant nutrition.
- Ensure that all teachers and staff at the center are provided training on the proper techniques for infant feeding.

Safety tips to keep in mind when starting infants on foods:

- Make sure baby is able to sit on his or her own.
- Make sure baby is seated upright. Feeding a reclining baby can be hazardous.
- Make sure an adult is supervising.
- Make sure foods are not choking hazards or allergens. Do not cut foods into pieces that are too small for baby to safely move around and chew before swallowing.
- Follow baby's lead. Babies know what they want to eat and when they are finished.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Finger feeding is fun and rewarding for older babies, but it's important to avoid foods that can cause choking and those with little nutritional value.

- *Before presenting your child with a finger food, try a bite first and ask yourself:*
 - Does it melt in the mouth? (Ex. Some dry cereals and crackers will melt in the mouth).
 - Is it well-cooked? Well-cooked veggies and fruits will mush easily.
 - Is it naturally soft? (Ex. Cottage cheese, shredded cheese, and small pieces of tofu).
 - Can it be gummed? (Pieces of ripe banana and well-cooked pasta can be gummed.)
- *Tips for success:*
 - Cut food into appropriate sized pieces, depending on the food's texture.
 - Introduce meat with well-cooked ground meats or shreds of thinly sliced deli meats.
 - Present each baby with a variety of foods; it can take 10 or more tries before a new food is accepted.