Good eating habits develop early. Parents can help babies develop a good attitude about food.

When to feed your baby?
Feed your baby when she is hungry. Stop feeding her when she is full. Learning and paying attention to your baby’s cues for hunger and fullness will put your child on the path to being healthy and fit.

In her first few months, when your baby is hungry she may
- Begin to move her mouth
- Rapidly move her eyes in her sleep
- Try to suck on her hand or tongue, your shoulder, or anything she can touch
- Bob her head and search around
- Be fussy, squirm, stretch, and clench her fists or toes

When your baby has had enough food, he may
- Push away the bottle or breast
- Turn his head away
- Put his hands in front of his mouth
- Forcefully move his entire body away from you
- Smile and relax his body
- Fall asleep with the nipple in his mouth

When your 5- to 6-month-old baby is hungry, she may
- Open her mouth when she sees the breast or bottle
- Lean forward to be able to drink

When your baby has had enough food, she may
- Hold her mouth tightly shut
- Push away the breast or bottle
- Lose interest in eating
- Turn her upper body away

Your baby may not be hungry every time he cries.
Try to figure out why your baby is crying, and soothe him in other ways. If you think it is too soon for your baby to be hungry, try to distract him by playing with him or helping him become interested in another activity.
What to feed your baby?
All of your baby’s food and nutrition needs can be met with breast milk or formula. No extra water or other liquid is needed. Don’t give your baby fruit juice or sugary drinks.

No matter what family or friends say about introducing solids, follow your doctor’s guidelines regarding breast milk and formula. Interested friends or relatives may pressure you to “fatten her up,” but fat does not equal healthy. Putting on too much weight during these early months may cause your child to be overweight later.

How to feed your baby?

Breastfeeding
Breast milk is easier to digest and helps protect babies from infections and allergies. Breastfed babies tend to eat more often (every hour or so) than bottle-fed babies during the first few months. Nursing will often cause a mother’s breast to make more milk. One way to know if your baby is getting enough milk is by the number of wet diapers in a day (at least 6 per day). Burp your baby often after feeding to make sure to get the air bubbles out.

Bottle feeding
Most parents like to warm the formula to body temperature, but cool formula won’t hurt her. To heat the bottle: either hold the bottle under hot tap water for a minute or place in a pan of warm water that was just removed from the stove. Always shake the bottle well to mix the formula. Test the temperature of the formula by sprinkling some on the back of your hand. If it feels lukewarm, it’s okay for her to drink. Burp your baby often after feeding to make sure to get the air bubbles out.

Feeding safety and health tips
• Don’t heat the bottle in the microwave. The bottle may feel cool on the outside but have hot spots inside that could burn your baby’s mouth.
• Keep the bottle cool (pack the bottle in an insulated cooler with some ice when you go out). Bacteria can grow rapidly in formula/milk that is not refrigerated.
• Don’t prop the bottle in your baby’s mouth and leave her alone or put your baby to bed with a bottle.

Feeding time is a special time to build love and trust
One of the most important parts of feeding is the warmth and pleasure your baby feels while being held and fed by you. Hold your baby so she can see your face when you feed her. Look at her. Talk to her. Hunger is a basic human need. Your baby must rely on you to meet this need. How you respond to your baby’s needs will affect the trust your baby has in you.

Adapted from content published in the Just in Time Parenting (JITP) newsletters at www.extension.org/parenting.