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JOHN R. BOSCO, M.D., FAAP
RODERICK G. DAVIS, M.D., FAAP
MICHAEL J. HOLMES, M.D., Ph.D., FAAP
CHAD B. PRESTON, M.D., FAAP
JOANNE P. CORDARO, M.D., FAAP
SHERRY W. SMITH, M.S., P.N.P.
1700 Hudson Ave
Rochester, N.Y. 14617

6 TO 12 MONTHS

By Dr. Chad Preston

Nutrition

By 6 months, many babies are eating solid foods 3 times per day. Once the baby has been sitting up well for a couple of months (around 8 months of age), you can start stage III foods, which have a thicker texture, and finger foods like infant cereal puffs. Continue breast milk or formula until the first birthday, at which time whole milk should be started (although continuing breastfeeding is fine too). Juice is OK but limit it to 4 ounces per day. Never put your child to bed with a bottle.

Avoid choking hazards—anything hard or crunchy like nuts, popcorn, carrots, apples, etc. Make sure foods are cut into small pieces, especially round items like grapes and hot dogs which are about the size of an infant's airway.

Let us know if you use well water or any other nonmunicipal water source. If so, your baby should start a fluoride supplement at 6 months of age. Ask if your doctor recommends any other vitamin supplements.

Sleep

During these months, many infants may wake up at night. There are several reasons for this, including development of separation anxiety and teething pain that may be worse when lying down. A pediatric sleep expert named Dr. Richard Ferber described a simple and effective method to help babies sleep. Sometimes referred to as the “cry it out” method, it's widely misunderstood. Of course, no one is recommending that you let your child cry and cry for hours until they exhaust themselves and fall asleep. That's cruel.

The key to this method is consistency of the sleep environment. Think of this: we all wake up several times each night, but we fall asleep again so quickly that we don't remember awakening. However, if you fell asleep in one place but woke up someplace else, you would notice. You'd be confused and probably frightened. This is what happens when a baby falls asleep in your arms and wakes up in his crib.

Put your child down when he's drowsy but not yet asleep. If he starts to cry, wait 2 or 3 minutes before entering the room. When you go in, talk to him, sing to him, rub his back, or do whatever provides comfort, except *don't pick him up*. After about a minute, say goodnight and leave the room again (he doesn't need to completely stop crying). If crying continues or returns, add 1 minute to the amount of time he cries before you go in, and repeat. Some babies will fall asleep after a few cycles, and some will take longer. Parents usually say that the first couple of nights using this method are difficult, but after that the baby sleeps well. They will not be damaged by crying, and because the method is so effective, you're trading a couple of nights for many peaceful months ahead. The message you are sending is, "My job is not to remove you from your sleep environment, but if you really need me, I am always here."

Solving Your Child's Sleep Problems by Richard Ferber, M.D., is available in the Monroe County Library System: <http://www3.libraryweb.org>

Safety

Since your child will be moving around more, this is a good time to double check that your home is safe. A safe environment for kids includes: working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, stair gates, outlet plug covers, latches on kitchen cabinets, hot water heater set at maximum of 120 degrees, supervision of animals around the baby. Make sure there are no small objects like buttons or coins that can be grabbed and swallowed. The car seat must remain in the rear of the car, facing backwards. A stationary standing station ("exersaucer") is OK for babies that can support themselves, but walkers cause many injuries and should not be used.

All kids should wear sunscreen when outdoors in the sun. Even kids that don't burn need protection against skin cancer later in life. Choose a sunscreen with SPF of at least 15 that protects against both UVA and UVB rays. Remember to reapply every few hours or after swimming. Even with sunscreen, try to avoid too much outdoor time in the hottest midday hours.

Development

Read baby books together. Talk and sing to your baby all the time to get her interested in language. Children should not watch any television before the age of 2. There are many companies that want to sell you DVDs, but no study has ever shown any educational benefit in children younger than 2. In fact, there may be some harm. Studies have shown:

Children who watched the most television at 12 months had 28% more attention problems at age 7. (*Pediatrics*, April 2004)

In infants from 8 to 16 months of age, each hour of daily viewing of baby DVDs was associated with lower scores on a language development test. (*Journal of Pediatrics*, October 2007)

Illness

If your child ingests any medicine, chemical, or other potentially hazardous substance, immediately contact Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222.

Fevers are common in this age group. Fevers can be very high, although it is rare to go much higher than 104 degrees. The number on the thermometer does not tell you “how sick” a child is—that is, a child at 103 is not sicker than a child at 102. Temperatures between 99 and 101 do not represent a true fever. These slight elevations above normal body temperature are beneficial to help the immune system fight off illness. Temperatures above 101 should be treated with Tylenol or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin). **Decongestant and cough medicines should never be given to children younger than 4 years.** If a child with a fever is generally acting well (normal activity, appetite, and color, no rashes), then they are best evaluated in our office during office hours.

Remember that there is a doctor to see patients in the office in the morning every Saturday and most Sundays. If you have an urgent issue after hours that cannot wait until morning, call the doctor on call at 342-5665. Before calling, please check the American Academy of Pediatrics Symptom Checker as 90% of common questions are answered there. Go to <http://www.healthychildren.org>, click Tips & Tools, then Symptom Checker.

Much more information about infant care is available at our Web site:
<http://www.ppgkids.com>

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