

# Helping Your Baby Eat Well in Hospital

Your baby needs enough food and nutrition to get better in the hospital. Being ill may increase their need for protein, calories, and other nutrients.

## Eating well in hospital can help your baby:

- get energy and maintain strength
- avoid muscle and weight loss
- heal and recover
- reduce the length of stay in the hospital



## Nutrition while in hospital

Your baby's healthcare team will order a diet based on your baby's needs. This 'diet order' may depend on how your baby was feeding at home.

Talk to your healthcare team about how your baby usually eats. This includes:

- **how** they are feeding (breastfeeding, bottle feeding, eating solid foods, or tube feeding)
- **what** they are eating (breastmilk, formula, texture of solids)
- **how often** they are feeding



### Tip:

Show photos to your healthcare team of what you offer your baby at home. This provides details that may be hard to remember, such as:

- formula brands
- supplements (vitamins, minerals)

## Eating well in hospital

The tips below can help your baby get enough nutrition while in hospital.

- Be present at mealtimes to offer help.
- Bring your baby's bottles and nipples from home.
- Hold your baby the way you usually do when feeding, if possible.
- Offer food and drink to your baby often. It is okay to offer your baby food between meals.
- Bring a breastfeeding pillow from home. This can help you and your baby be more comfortable. Some units may have one you can use while your baby is in hospital.
- Ask for breastfeeding help or support if you have concerns about:
  - breastfeeding
  - your breastmilk supply
- Bring your baby's favourite foods from home. Check with your healthcare team before bringing food from home.
- Bring spoons and other familiar feeding utensils from home.
- Avoid adding medication to your baby's foods. This can change the taste and texture.

## Ask your healthcare team:

- if there is food and infant cereal on the unit to use between meals
- for a highchair for your baby
- how to label and safely store foods brought from home
- how to label and clean utensils, bottles, or nipples brought from home
- if you would like to borrow a breast pump
- if there is a quiet place to breastfeed or pump breastmilk
- where to get hot water to warm up bottles
- where to warm up food



## Preparing for tests and procedures

There may be times in the hospital when your baby is not able to have food.

### Talk to your healthcare team about:

- food or drink your baby can have before tests
- the last time your baby can eat or drink before a test or procedure
- when and what your baby can have after a test or procedure
- when and what your baby can have if their test or procedure gets canceled or delayed
- when your baby can have meals if they have not eaten for more than 24 hours



## If your baby is not eating or drinking their usual amount

### Your healthcare team will:

- monitor how your baby is eating and growing in the hospital
- help your baby get extra nutrition if they are not getting enough

You can talk with your healthcare team if you have concerns about how much your baby is eating or drinking.



## For more support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on [ahs.ca/811](https://ahs.ca/811).
- Visit [ahs.ca/nutrition](https://ahs.ca/nutrition).

