

**6**

**Offer the child different food every day. A varied diet is a colorful meal.**

From the beginning a child should get used to different foods.

Only a variety in the diet avoids the monotony of meals and assures the quantity of iron and vitamins that the child needs, keeping a good health and adequate growth.

Iron from food is better absorbed when the child receives, in the same meal, meat and fruit rich in vitamin C. The formation of eating habits is very important and begins very early. It is quite common for a child to accept new foods only after several trials and not on the first ones. What may seem as a rejection to the new food is actually the result of the child's natural process in getting to know new tastes and textures and of the maturing of reflexes of the child. The food should be offered separately, so that the child learns to identify the colors and tastes. Put the portions of food on the plate, without mixing them.

**7**

**Stimulate the daily consumption of fruit and vegetables at meal time.**

The children must get used to eating fruit and vegetables early on, because these are important sources of vitamins, calcium, iron and fibers.

To season these foods, the use of onions, garlic, oil, little salt and herbs (parsley, scallions and cilantro) is recommended.

**8**

**Avoid sugar, coffee, canned goods, fried stuff, soft drinks, candy, pastries and other goodies, in the first years of life. Use salt with moderation.**

Sugar, salt and fried stuff should be eaten with moderation, because their excess could bring future health problems. Sugar should only be used in children meals after a year of age.

These foods are not good nutrition for children and compete with much healthier foods.

Spicy food should be avoided (pepper, mustard, catchup, ready made condiments).

**9**

**Taking care of the hygiene when preparing and handling food; making sure of their appropriate storage and conservation.**

For a healthy diet, we must use fresh food, ripe and in good shape.

The meals offered to the children should be prepared shortly before eating, never offer leftovers. To avoid contamination of food and transmission of diseases, the persons responsible for preparing the meals should wash their hands and the foods that are going to be eaten, as well as the utensils and dishes where they are going to be prepared and served. The food should be kept in a fresh environment protected from insects and other animals. Leftovers that the child refused should not be offered again.

**10**

**Stimulate the sick and convalescent child to eat, offering their usual meals and their favorite foods, respecting their acceptance.**

Sick children, usually, have less appetite. Therefore, must be stimulated to eat, but, without pressure to eat. To assure a better nutrition and hydration of a sick child, it is advisable to offer their preferred foods, with the best accepted presentation, and increase the offer of liquids. For children with no appetite, offer a small volume of food at meal time and offer more times a day. To assure that the sick child eat better, it is important to sit next to them at meal times and to be more flexible with time tables and rules. In the period of convalescence, the appetite of the child is increased. For that reason it is recommended the offer of foods in this period, adding at least one meal in 24 hours.

Meanwhile the child eats with its own spoon, the person that is responsible for the feeding should be offering food with an other one.

# Ten steps of a healthy diet for Brazilian children under two years of age.

**1**

**Give only mother's milk up to six month, not offering water, teas or any other food.**

Mother's milk has all that a child needs up to 6 month of age, including water, besides protecting against infections. The child that receives other food besides breast milk before six month, specially through bottles, including water and teas, could get sick and undernourished.

**2**

**From six month on, offer in a slow and gradual way other foods, maintaining breast milk up to two years of age or more.**

From six month on, the body of a child is already preparing to receive foods different from mother's milk, those are called complementary foods. Although receiving other foods, the child should continue to breast feed up to two years or more, as the mother's milk keeps feeding the child and protecting it against diseases. With the introduction of the complementary food, it is important that the child get water between meals.

**3**

**Beginning at six month, give complementary foods (grains, roots, meats, fruits and vegetables) three times a day, if the child is getting breast fed, and five times a day if weaned.**

If the child is being breast fed, three meal a day with adequate foods are sufficient to warrant a good nutrition and growth, in the first year of life. In the second year of life, two snacks should be added, besides the three meals.

If the child is not breast feeding, it should receive five meals a day with complementary meals already beginning on the sixth month.

Some children need to be stimulated to eat (never forced).

**4**

**Complementary food should be offered without strict schedules, respecting always the child's wishes.**

Children breast fed on free demand develop very early the capacity of self control about ingestion of food, learning to distinguish between the sensations of fullness after meals and of hunger after fasting (period without food offered). Strict feeding schedules interfere with this process of self control by the child.

This precocious apprenticeship is fundamental in the formation of differences in the styles of food ingestion control in the first years of life.

The size of the meals is positively related to the breaks between the meals (large meals are associated to long breaks and vice-versa).

It is important that mothers develop a sensibility to distinguish the baby's hunger discomfort from other types of discomfort (sleepiness, cold, wet or dirty diapers, pain, need to cuddle), so that they do not insist in offering food to the child when it is not hungry. It is suggested, without a rigid time schedule, that, for the children breast feeding, three complementary meals be offered, one in the morning period, one at lunch time and the other at the end of the afternoon or beginning of the evening.

For weaned children, three meals and two snacks should be offered, distributed as follows: in the morning period (breakfast), mid morning (snack), lunch, mid afternoon (second snack), end of the afternoon or beginning of the evening (dinner).

**5**

**Complementary feeding must be thick from the beginning and offered in a spoon; begin with a pasty consistency (porridge/ purée) and gradually increasing its consistency until it gets to the family meals.**

In the beginning of the complementary meals, the diet offered to the child should be prepared specially for them, as porridge/purée of vegetables/grains/fruit. They are called transition food. From 8 month on, the meals prepared for the family may be offered as long as smashed, shredded, chopped or cut in small pieces.

Thin or soft food and soups do not have enough energy for a child.

The bottle should be avoided, as it can disturb the breast feeding and is an important source of contamination and transmission of diseases.

The use of cups is recommended (small cups) to offer water or other liquids, the semi-solid and solid diet on a plate, with a spoon.

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