



Smart Start

BEEF AS A FIRST FOOD FOR INFANTS

Complementary feeding is the practice of introducing solid foods to the diet of breastfed and formula-fed infants. Experts recommend beginning this practice around 6 months of age, when the baby's iron stores are depleting while their iron requirements are increasing substantially.^{1,2} While breastfeeding may continue into toddlerhood, complementary foods are an essential addition to the diet. These foods promote an infant's proper growth and development, as well as to prevent nutrient deficiencies with potential long-term adverse consequences.¹ The 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans encourage parents to choose nutrient-dense meats to make the most of every bite for infants and toddlers.⁷ Around 2.5 percent of infants eat beef in the first twelve months of life.⁴ The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that meat be introduced as an early solid food in an infant's diet, since proper nutrition during this critical time sets the stage for continued development and lifelong health.¹



STARTING STRONG FOR OPTIMAL GROWTH

With essential nutrients like iron, zinc, protein, B-vitamins, healthy monounsaturated fats and choline, beef as a complementary food is associated with normal physical growth in infants^{1,7,8}.

Recent research has shown that high protein intake from meat as a complementary food favorably increases growth but not adiposity in breastfed infants⁶.



INTRODUCING VITAL NUTRIENTS FOR A BUDDING BRAIN

Infants and toddlers need protein, iron and zinc to support brain health and optimal cognitive development³. Specifically, iron deficiency in children under two years of age can have significant and irreversible effects on brain development⁵. Research shows that the iron and zinc found in animal protein foods are more readily absorbed than the same nutrients from plant sources like rice and grains – an important consideration when selecting nutrient-rich complementary foods for infants¹.



NURTURING IMMUNITY

Zinc and iron play an important role in an infant's developing immune system¹. Introduction of iron- and zinc-rich foods such as meats, early in life supports immune function; and the growth of healthful bacteria in an infant's gastrointestinal tract, which plays an important role in enhancing immune function^{7,9}.

If you have questions about starting solid foods, consult a physician or healthcare provider.

Visit www.BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com for more research on beef's role as a complementary food.

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