

America's Obesity Crisis: What Every New Mom Needs to Know



You're a new mom with a perfectly pudgy new baby who is the light of your life. If you happen to be at the 4-month mark, your infant is about to eat his or her first organic food, starting with cereals like [Earth's Best Whole Grain Cereals](#) and progressing to pureed fruits and vegetables like [Earth's Best 1st: Beginner Foods](#) and Gerber's organic line of [Tender Harvest 1st Foods](#).

You're certainly aware of America's serious-as-a-heart-attack obesity crisis, but it's probably the last thing on your mind when it comes to your infant. After all, your baby eats so little and hasn't yet succumbed to Madison Avenue's advertising blitz for fast food, nutritionally bankrupt snack foods and sugar-laden sweets. Why worry?

Well, there are two reasons to address this question now-even if your baby is just beginning to crawl or walk.

1. You First!

The first issue: How are your eating habits? If you plan to serve as an example for your baby, you need to set the tone and be a good role model, experts agree.

"Given the escalating problems with increased pathologies at younger ages, it would make sense to invite the public to become more aware of moderation-not only in their

eating, but in the behaviors related to eating," says **Georgianna Donadio**, DC, MSc, PhD, founder, president and CEO of the Wellesley, Massachusetts-based New England School of Whole Health Education, and the mother of three children.

"Excessive multitasking, working long hours, lack of exercise, lack of rest, increased debt, anxiety and worry all contribute to the patterns and choices people establish in relationship to eating," she says. "It takes more than dietary guidelines to change the behaviors that result in poor eating habits."

2. Fat Begins In Utero

Once you examine-and modify-your eating behaviors, you'll need to address issue 2: how your baby's initial diet affects the rest of his or her life. According to a recent study in *Pediatrics*, the clinical medical journal published by the American Academy of Pediatrics, your baby's risk for obesity may actually begin before birth, continue through infancy and loom throughout early childhood.

The AAP is taking the issue extremely seriously, noting that childhood obesity rates continue to climb dramatically. In fact, a baby's birth weight and earliest eating habits may have a major influence on how he or she develops body mass and gains weight. If an infant gains weight too rapidly during the first year of development, he or she faces an increased risk of developing a high body mass index (BMI) as he approaches adulthood. (The BMI is the measurement physicians use to gauge obesity.)

If you aren't already doing so, consider breastfeeding, which experts have long agreed can play a role in preventing obesity as your child matures.

The lesson in all of this?

Your baby's eating habits begin with you, and following a balanced organic diet will set the pace for your entire family.

Guidelines for Moms

The National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine offers the following guidelines for new moms:

- Poor eating habits start early in life. Be vigilant about providing proper nutrition-beginning in infancy.
- Parents set the nutritional tone in every household. Be a good role model by stressing the right values, attitudes and behaviors toward food.
- Research continues to prove that breastfeeding helps prevent obesity, so make every effort to do so. Pump breast milk so it is readily available.
- Infants' taste buds are extremely receptive to sweet and salty flavors, so avoid "hooking them" on sugary beverages and salty foods.

- Introduce new foods (particularly vegetables at the appropriate age) to your baby's and toddler's diets as much as possible so your child becomes more willing to try new things.
- Babies and children have an innate ability to know how much food they require, so never push them to clean their plates or overeat.
- During each medical checkup, ask your doctor about your baby's weight and development. Is your baby on target, or are potential problems brewing?

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