

High Calorie Diet for Infants and Toddlers

Some infants and toddlers need to eat a high calorie diet to gain weight. Having a tiny tummy makes this hard. This handout will give you some ideas for high calorie foods to try, as well as items to add to foods that will boost the calorie content.

Introducing Solids

There is no perfect order for introducing solid foods. Parents often offer single grain, iron fortified cereals as the first food. This is not required. Pureed meats are a good first food because they are higher in calories, protein, iron, and zinc than many other choices.

Add new foods into your child's diet one at a time. Wait 3 days before adding another food. Watch for signs or symptoms of a food allergy. If there is not a family history of food allergies and your child does not have eczema, you may start peanut butter, nut butters, eggs, and fish along with other solids. Delaying these foods can increase food allergies.

If your child needs to be on high calorie fortified infant formula or breast milk, please talk to your health care provider first. You should be taught about the right recipe. This is to prevent an excess intake of nutrients, constipation and dehydration.

High Calorie Foods for Infants

Try thinning with formula, broth, or breast milk when you first offer these foods.

- Avocados (pureed)
- Beans – black, navy, red, pinto, kidney, white (cooked and mashed)
- Eggs (mash the yolk); cook and cut into small strips
- Bananas
- Mangoes

- Lentils (cooked and mashed)
- Fresh ground meats (dark meat poultry, beef, lamb, pork)
- Whole milk yogurt
- Full fat cottage cheese (4% fat – may need to puree or try small curd)
- Mashed sweet potatoes
- Mashed potatoes
- Peanut butter or nut butter (thinning will reduce stickiness)
- Goat cheese
- Cooked quinoa and barley

High Calorie Finger Foods

- Sweet potato fries
- Mozzarella balls
- Cheese curds
- Homemade cheese crackers or cheese puffs (see recipe)
- Diced summer sausage
- Dried fruit
- Mini quiche
- Hard boiled eggs
- Frosted wheat biscuits
- Diced grilled cheese sandwich
- Homemade pancakes, waffles, and French toast sticks
- Tofu sauteed in oil
- Peanut butter balls (see recipe)
- Sugar plums (see recipe)

High Calorie Additives

You can add these items to pureed and mashed baby food, yogurt, cereals, and eggs. Start with 1/2 teaspoon for every 1/4 cup and work up from there. Discuss with your provider.

- Oils (canola, safflower, flaxseed, walnut, and sunflower are good sources of essential fats)
- Butter

- Ground flaxseed
- Ground chia seeds
- Heavy cream
- Cheese
- Dry milk powder
- Sour cream
- Cream cheese
- Maple syrup
- Wheat germ

Other Tips

- Make your own baby food. Although this requires extra work, it is often higher in calories. You could prepare all the food you will need a few times per month, put in ice cube trays, and keep in the freezer.
- Talk to your daycare provider about adding extra calories to your child's meals throughout the day.
- Bring your own food to daycare.
- Avoid giving more than 2 ounces of juice daily. Juice will fill your baby up without providing enough nutrition.
- Try putting foods into a mesh bag to allow our baby to enjoy them without the fear of choking.

Recipes

Cheddar Cheese Puffs

These are a soft, high calorie snack.

1 cup flour
 6 Tbsp butter, chilled and diced
 2 tsp baking powder
 1-3 Tbsp heavy cream
 3 cups grated cheddar cheese

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a food processor or mixer, combine first 4 ingredients until crumbly. Add the cream gradually until a dough forms.

Using a 1 teaspoon scoop form the dough into balls. Bake for 15 minutes or until golden brown.

No Bake Peanut Butter Balls

These are easy to make and nutrient dense!

1/2 cup creamy peanut butter
 2/3 cup shredded coconut
 1/3 cup maple syrup
 1/2 cup ground flaxseed meal
 1 tsp vanilla extract
 1/3 cup mini chocolate chips
 1 cup old-fashioned oats (raw)

In a mixing bowl, stir together peanut butter, syrup and vanilla extract. Add the rest of the ingredients and stir until coated. Transfer mixture to the fridge or freezer and chill until set. Remove from the fridge and shape into 1-inch balls. Store in the fridge in an airtight container.

Sugar Plums

These are tasty, healthy, and great for little fingers.

3/4 cup nuts or seeds, toasted
 1/2 teaspoon orange zest
 1/2 cup dried plums (prunes)
 1/4 cup maple syrup
 1/2 cup dried apricots
 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
 1/2 cup dried cranberries
 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
 1/4 cup dried cherries

Put all ingredients in a food processor. Mix until smooth. Wearing gloves (or spraying hands with nonstick cooking spray), roll into 1-inch balls. Store in the fridge in an airtight container.

Who to Call

If you have questions, please contact your provider through MyChart or call your provider listed in your After Visit Summary or After Hospital Care Plan.

For a list of UW Health Clinics, visit www.uwhealth.org/.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 1/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#343