



## Breastfeeding may lessen picky eating

Something happens to some babies - even babies who are "good eaters" - after the age of two. Kids who were once happy to eat all sorts of things suddenly reject their old favourites and can also refuse to try new foods.

But if you want to lessen the chance of your child becoming a picky eater, you should practice exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of baby's life then continue breastfeeding, complementing it with a nutritious variety of solid foods for up to two years or beyond.

Says Berna Harmse, President of the Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA), "A child's eating habits develop from early infancy. Breast milk can offer different tastes for the baby depending on the mother's diet, so it can help promote more tolerance and taste for a variety of foods than formula feeding."

Harmse explains that children are most willing to eat a variety of foods between ages one and two, but that willingness declines thereafter, reaching its lowest point by age four.

"This is called the neophobic phase, where they can suddenly become fearful or reluctant to try new foods," she says.

But if a child gets into the habit of eating a variety of foods before they reach the neophobic phase the benefits can extend further on into childhood, adolescence and early adulthood.

Food variety is essential for getting all the macro- and micronutrients they need. Once solid foods are introduced the child develops specific food preferences through repeated exposure to these foods.

Says Harmse, "Ultimately children's exposure to flavours during these key first few months of their life shapes their taste preferences and influences their food choices later in life."

"This underlines the importance of promoting good nutrition – first through exclusive breastfeeding, then through a good combination of nutritious foods in early childhood," she says.

***World Breastfeeding Week is celebrated every year from 1 to 7 August in more than 120 countries to encourage breastfeeding and improve the health of babies around the world.***

**For more information on breastfeeding and nutrition, contact a registered dietitian. Visit [www.adsa.org.za](http://www.adsa.org.za)**

**ENDS**

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### References

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