

# Smart Start



## BEEF AS A FIRST FOOD FOR INFANTS

The addition of solid foods to the diet of breastfed and formula-fed infants, referred to as complementary feeding, is recommended to begin around 6 months of age, when the child enters a period of rapid growth and development. Complementary foods are essential to promote a baby's proper growth and development as well as to prevent vitamin and mineral deficiencies with potential long-term adverse consequences, even though breastfeeding may continue beyond 2 years.<sup>1</sup> The World Health Organization guidelines for complementary feeding recommend daily intake of animal source foods to ensure nutrient needs are met.<sup>2</sup> It is reported that 5 percent of infants consume baby-food meat and 12 percent of infants consume non-baby-food meat in their first nine months.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, 1.3 percent of infants consume beef in this timeframe.<sup>3</sup> The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that meat, including beef, 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.<sup>1</sup>

1

### STARTING STRONG FOR OPTIMAL GROWTH

Beef contains essential nutrients to fuel a child's early growth and development. With nutrients like zinc, iron and protein, along with vitamins B<sub>6</sub> and B<sub>12</sub>, choline and selenium, beef as a complementary food is associated with normal physical growth in infants.<sup>4,5</sup> Recent research has shown that high protein intake from meat as a complementary food favorably increases growth but not adiposity in breastfed infants.<sup>4</sup>

2

### INTRODUCING VITAL NUTRIENTS FOR A BUDDING BRAIN

Infants and toddlers need protein, iron and zinc to support brain health and optimal cognitive development.<sup>6</sup> Iron deficiency can have long-term effects on learning, behavior and neurodevelopment.<sup>7</sup> 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 infants.<sup>8</sup>

3

### NURTURING IMMUNITY

Zinc and iron play an important role in an infant's developing immune system.<sup>8</sup> Introduction of foods that are a good dietary source of iron and zinc, like beef, early in life supports the growth of healthful bacteria in an infant's gastrointestinal tract, which plays an important role in enhancing immune function.<sup>9-11</sup>

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

Visit [www.BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com](http://www.BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com) for more research on beef's role as a complementary food.

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