

**MINNESOTA WIC PROGRAM****Transitioning to Table Foods and a Cup: Infant Feeding Series****MID-CERTIFICATION VISIT AROUND 9 MONTHS****The Nine Month Old**

Nine month old babies are busy developing their large motor skills, learning to crawl and to pull up to things. New skills are also being practiced during meal times. Most babies at this age have developed the pincher grasp and enjoy self-feeding, and do not want to be spoon fed. They may want to hold a spoon, but most are not yet able to get the spoon to their mouth without dumping food off if it, so fingers work best. If offered soft table foods, they do very well eating them and may begin to refuse baby foods. By 9 months most babies are able to drink well from a cup. 9-month olds are usually very social. Eating with others at mealtimes helps develop their social skills.

**Why does WIC test hemoglobin levels?**

At the 9 month WIC visit hemoglobin levels are tested for the first time. Parents may be wondering why their child has to get “poked” at WIC. This presents a great opportunity to explain to moms and dads that maintaining adequate iron stores is important for brain development and other functions of the body. To maintain iron stores, it’s important for their baby to eat healthy foods, including iron-rich foods daily. These messages are important even when hemoglobin levels are within normal levels at 9 months to prevent low hemoglobin levels as a toddler.

Some key education messages include:

- Hemoglobin is the part of the blood that carries oxygen to all parts of the body. The body needs iron to make hemoglobin.
- Your baby needs enough iron for brain development.
- It’s important to feed your baby foods high in iron every day. Foods high in iron include meats, dry beans, peanut butter and iron fortified cereal.
- The body absorbs iron from non-meat iron-rich foods better, when eaten at the same time as a food high in Vitamin C (e.g., citrus, strawberries, broccoli).

**Foods to offer:**

The first year of life is crucial for establishing long-term preferences for healthy foods and beverages. Research has shown that what a baby eats around 9 months of age ***is what he will like to eat when he is school age.***

The 2008 FITS study found that many infants do not adhere to a healthy dietary pattern. More than 40% of 9-12 month olds consumed sweets such as desserts and sugar sweetened

beverages daily. In contrast, only 40% of 9-12 month olds consumed enough meats/proteins to meet their daily requirements.

Important messages about foods to offer at this age include:

- Offer a variety of vegetables, fruits and whole grains **early and often**.
- Offer foods high in iron and zinc **at least twice a day**. Foods high in iron and zinc include meats, dry beans, peanut butter, eggs, iron fortified cereal (WIC cereals).
- Discuss with parents, ideas for age-appropriate meats to offer and discourage offering processed meats such as hot dogs or lunch meats.
- It may take many exposures to a food (6-35 times according to studies) before some foods are accepted.
- Avoid foods with high sugar, salt and/or fat content and low nutritional value, such as french fries, cookies, sweetened cereals and sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Offer an open cup at meals with water, breastmilk or formula to help baby become skilled at drinking from a cup. Offering water from a cup helps babies get used to drinking water. This also helps prepare for weaning from a bottle.

### **Practical tips:**

The transition from baby food to lumpy foods or table foods may be challenging for some families, due to their family situation. Many families may not be used to sitting down together to eat a meal, or meals may be very sporadic. Foods offered to older children and adults may be mostly processed foods, not ideal for an older infant. Some helpful hints you may offer parents include:

- Offer suggestions for finger foods that would be appropriate for baby. Discuss how these might fit into the family's meals.
- Suggest removing some food for baby before adding salt and butter to food for the rest of the family.
- Ask the parent to describe a typical meal that the family might eat, and explore together how parts of the meal could be made appropriate for the baby. (Example: Burritos— Offer small pieces of tortilla, whole beans, and rice to baby. Break meat into smaller pieces, and offer to baby)
- Model healthy eating. Encourage mom to offer more vegetables and fruit, lean sources of protein, good sources of whole grains and fewer processed foods to the whole family.
- Talk about their family situation and explore their motivation and ideas for how to fit in family mealtimes.

### **Food Safety Reminders:**

- No honey until age 1. This includes honey used in baking.
- Avoid choking hazards such as nuts, grapes, popcorn, hot dogs and hard candies.
- Always supervise your baby during feeding time.