

vitamins, and minerals—all of which have an impact on the growing fetus. Nurses should encourage and provide information for parents to discuss the options of breastfeeding or bottle feeding the infant well in advance of the delivery date. The choice for either is highly individual and is discussed in [Chapter 7](#). This section is primarily concerned with infant nutrition during the months when growth needs and developmental milestones ready the child for the introduction of solid foods.

Despite adequate availability of optimum nutrient sources, experts are concerned that infants are not fed appropriately. Infants may be given solid foods when their digestive systems are not ready to completely absorb such foods. In addition, drinks that are inappropriate for growing infants may be given in place of enriched infant milk and may only provide “empty” calories and contribute to childhood and adult obesity and place infants at risk for iron-deficiency anemia, vitamin D deficiency, and rickets. A survey of infant feeding practices found that about 20% of infants had consumed solid foods before 4 months old despite recommendations that such foods not be introduced until 4 to 6 months old ([Aronsson, Uusitalo, Vehik, et al, 2015](#)). Infant health practices, including nutrition, may have a far-reaching, long-term impact on the child's life. Growth and development could be negatively affected, and so could the risk of acquiring certain chronic health conditions. There is some evidence that childhood obesity is significantly decreased when breastfeeding is continued and solid food introduction is delayed until at least 4 months old ([Moss and Yeaton, 2014](#)). Nurses must be proactive in teaching parents what constitutes appropriate infant nutrition and nutritional habits, which provide the child with an optimum opportunity to grow and develop into a healthy child and adult.

Health care professionals have recently become more aware of the use of complementary and alternative medical therapies in children that may not be as beneficial as touted in various media sources. One concern is children's intake of megavitamins and herbs; parents may assume that the word *natural* in reference to ingredients means the product is safe when this may not be the case. It is important for nurses to be aware of the effects, availability, and practice of complementary therapies and to be able to cogently discuss their use with parents.