

# Starting Solid Foods

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends children be introduced to foods other than breast milk or infant formula when they are about 6 months old depending on the baby's readiness and nutritional needs. Generally,

## Signs that your baby is developmentally ready:

- Your baby can sit with little or no support.
- Your baby has good head control.
- Your baby opens her mouth and leans forward when food is offered.
- Your baby's tongue-thrust reflex is gone or diminished. This reflex, which prevents infants from choking, also causes them to push food out of their mouths.

### NOTE:

The AAP recommends breastfeeding as the sole source of nutrition for your baby for about 6 months. When you add solid foods to your baby's diet, continue breastfeeding until at least 12 months. You can continue to breastfeed after 12 months if you and your baby desire. Check with your child's doctor about the recommendations for vitamin D and iron supplements during the first year.

## Helpful Feeding Tips

- Introduce solid food when your baby isn't cranky or tired.
- Start with half a spoonful or less.
- To help prevent frustration, consider feeding a little breast milk or formula first, then switch to small spoonfuls of food; finish with more breast milk or formula.
- Your baby may not know what to do at first, and may look confused, roll the food around inside his mouth, or even reject it.
- Don't make your baby eat if he cries or turns away. Just like learning to walk and talk, learning to eat solid food is a gradual process!

when babies have doubled their birthweight (often around 4 months), it may be time to introduce food. Your baby's doctor will advise you when it's the right time to introduce solid food.

## What should I feed my baby first?

- Traditionally, single-grain, iron-fortified cereals made for babies are introduced first. Baby cereals can be mixed with breast milk, formula, or water.
- Once your baby is doing well eating cereal off a spoon, it may be time to introduce single-ingredient puréed vegetables, fruit, or meat. The order in which foods are introduced doesn't matter, but go slow. Introduce one food at a time and wait several days before trying something else new. This will let you identify any foods that your baby may be allergic to.

### NOTE:

Do not put baby cereal in a bottle, because your baby could choke. It may also increase the amount of food your baby eats and can cause your baby to gain too much weight. However, cereal in a bottle may be recommended if your baby has reflux. Check with your child's doctor.

## When should I start other foods?

- When your baby has successfully eaten individual foods, it's OK to offer a puréed mix of two foods. When your child is about 9 months old, coarser, chunkier textures will be OK as she starts moving to a diet that includes more table foods.
- Within a few months of starting solid foods, your baby's daily diet should include a variety of foods, such as breast milk, formula, or both; meats; cereal; vegetables; fruits; eggs; and fish.

## Feeding Fresh Food

- Use a blender or food processor, or mash softer foods with a fork.
- All fresh foods should be cooked with no added salt or seasoning.
- Fruits and vegetables (other than mashed bananas) should be cooked until they are soft.

# Feeding Safety

## Feeding and Storage

- If you use commercially prepared baby food in jars, spoon some of the food into a bowl to feed your baby. Do not feed your baby directly from the jar, because bacteria from the baby's mouth can contaminate the remaining food. If you refrigerate opened jars of baby food, it's best to throw away anything not eaten within a day or two.
- Refrigerate any prepared, fresh, table food you do not use, and look for any signs of spoilage before giving it to your baby. Fresh foods are not bacteria-free, so they will spoil more quickly than food from a can or jar.

## Allergies

The eight most common allergy-causing foods are milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, and soybeans. Generally, you do not need to delay introducing these foods to your child, but if you have a family history of food allergies, talk to your child's doctor or nurse about what to do for your baby. Possible signs of food allergy or allergic reactions include:

- rash
- bloating or an increase in gassiness
- diarrhea
- vomiting
- Hives or difficulty in breathing - Seek IMMEDIATE medical attention.

## What about finger food and table food?

Typically, around 9 months, or when your baby can sit up and bring her hands or other objects to her mouth, she is ready to learn to feed herself. Only offer soft, easy-to-swallow food cut up into small pieces. Some examples might include:

- Small pieces of banana
- Wafer-type cookies or crackers
- Scrambled eggs
- Well-cooked pasta or rice
- Well-cooked, finely chopped chicken
- Well-cooked, cut-up potatoes or peas

## Eggs, Dairy, Soy, Peanuts & Fish

Waiting until your baby is older to introduce baby-safe (soft), allergy-causing foods, such as eggs, dairy, soy, peanuts, or fish, has not been proven to prevent food allergy. If you believe your baby has had an allergic reaction to a food talk with your baby's doctor about the best dietary choices.

## Choking

DO NOT give your baby any food that requires chewing at this age. Do not give your baby any food that can be a choking hazard including (but not limited to):

- Hot dogs (also meat sticks, or baby food "hot dogs")
- Nuts and seeds
- Chunks of meat or cheese
- Whole grapes
- Popcorn
- Chunks of peanut butter
- Raw vegetables
- Fruit chunks (like apple chunks)
- Hard or chewy candy or gum
- Marshmallows

## Honey

Do not give your baby honey until after his first birthday. Honey may contain certain spores that can cause botulism in babies.

## Cow's Milk

Do not give regular cow's milk until your baby is older than 12 months because it does not have the nutrition that infants need. Begin with whole milk when your baby is 12 months old.

## Start Good Habits Early

*It is important for your baby to have the full experience of eating – sitting up, feeding from/ with a spoon, resting between bites, and stopping when full. This will help your child learn good eating habits for life!*

- Encourage family meals from the first feeding, and eat together as a family as often as possible.
- Remember to offer a good variety of healthy foods that are rich in the nutrients your child needs.
- Watch your child for cues that he has had enough to eat, and do not overfeed.
- If you have any questions about your child's nutrition, please make sure to talk to your child's doctor.

## References

The American Academy of Pediatrics: [healthychildren.org](http://healthychildren.org)  
brightfutures.aap.org, Kids Health from Nemours: [kidshealth.org](http://kidshealth.org)