

INTRODUCING SOLID FOOD TO YOUR BABY

When To Introduce Solid Foods

Solid food should be introduced at 4 to 5 months of age. Your baby should be able to sit in a high chair, feeding seat or an infant seat with good head control. If your baby pushes food out of his/her mouth and it dribbles onto the chin, your baby may not yet be able to move the food to the back of the mouth and swallow it. That's normal. You may want to wait a week or two and try again.

NOTE: The American Association of Pediatrics recommends providing your baby only breastmilk for approximately 6 months after birth. After that, the AAP supports continued breastfeeding along with introductory foods. You should continue breastfeeding after introducing foods at 6 months for as long as you and your child wish, for 2 years or beyond.

How to Feed Your Baby Properly

Your baby's first foods are your choice. Whether you decide to make your own baby food or buy pre-made baby food, you have many options. However, keep the following in mind:

1. Foods should be soft or pureed to prevent choking.
2. Introduce one "single ingredient" new food from any food group every 3 to 5 days. Watch for any type of allergic reaction.
3. There is no evidence that waiting to introduce baby-safe (soft) foods, such as eggs, dairy, soy, peanut products or fish beyond 4 to 6 months of age prevents food allergies.
4. There is no evidence that your baby will develop a dislike for vegetables if fruit is given first.
5. Be sure to include foods that provide iron and zinc, such as baby food made with meat or iron-fortified cereals.

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.

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. Do not give honey until 12 months of age.

When to Introduce Finger Foods

Once your baby can sit up and bring his/her hands or other objects to his/her mouth, you can give him/her finger foods. To prevent choking, make sure anything you give your baby is soft, easy to swallow, and cut into small pieces. Some examples include small pieces of banana, wafer-type cookies or crackers; scrambled eggs; well-cooked pasta; well-cooked, finely chopped chicken; and well-cooked, cut-up potatoes or peas.

At each of your baby's daily meals, he/she should be eating about 4 ounces, or the amount in one small jar of strained baby food. Limit processed foods that are made for adults and older children. These foods often contain more salt and other preservatives.

If you want to give your baby fresh food, use a blender or food processor, or just mash softer foods with a fork. All fresh foods should be cooked with no added salt or seasoning. Although you can feed your baby raw bananas (mashed), most other fruits and vegetables should be cooked

until they are soft. Refrigerate any 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.

*NOTE: Do not give your baby any food that requires chewing at this age, or any food that can be a choking hazard. Foods to **AVOID** include hot dogs (including 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, such as apple chunks; and hard, gooey, or sticky candy.*

Changes to be Expected After Starting on Solid Food

When your baby starts eating solid foods, his/her stools will become more solid and variable in color. Because of the added sugars and fats, they will have a much stronger odor. Peas and other green vegetables may turn the stool a deep-green color; beets may make it red. (Beets sometimes make urine red as well).

Your baby’s stool may contain undigested pieces of food, especially pieces of peas or corn, and the skin of tomatoes or other vegetables. This is normal.

Should I Give My Baby Juice?

Babies do not need juice. Babies younger than 12 months should NOT be given juice. After 12 months of age (up to 3 months of age), give only 100% fruit juice and no more than 4 ounces a day. Offer it only in a cup, not in a bottle. To help prevent tooth decay, do not put your child to bed with a bottle. If you do, make sure it only contains water. Juice reduces the appetite for other, more nutritious foods, including breast milk, formula or both. Too much juice can also cause diaper rash, diarrhea, or excessive weight gain.

Does My Baby Need Water?

Healthy babies do not need extra water. Breast milk, formula, or a combination of both provide all the fluids they need. However, it is okay to offer a little water when you begin to give your baby solid foods. Use an open, sippy or strawed cup and limit water to no more than 1 cup (8 ounces) each day. Also, a small amount of water may be needed in very hot weather. If you live in an area where the water contains fluoride, drinking the fluoridated water will also help to prevent future tooth decay.

Good Eating Habits Start Early

It is important for your baby to get used to the process of eating while sitting up, taking food from a spoon, resting between bites and stopping when full. These early experiences will help your child learn good eating habits throughout his/her life.

Encourage family meals from the first feeding. When you can, the whole family should eat together. Research suggests that having dinner together, as a family, on a regular basis has positive effects on the development of children.

Remember to offer a variety of healthy foods that are rich in the nutrients your child needs. Watch your child for cues that they have had enough to eat. Do not overfeed!