

Introducing Solids To Your Infant



Introducing solid foods to your baby is a developmental milestone. Infants only need breast milk or formula for the first 4 - 6 months of life to meet their nutritional needs. Babies are often ready to begin complementary solid foods between four and six months, but breast milk or formula will continue to provide most of your baby's calories until one year of age. Always check with your network pediatrician about the best time to introduce solid foods to your baby.



A few signs that your baby is ready for solids

- Your baby is at least four months old
- Your baby is showing interest in solid foods, such as watching you eat
- Your baby is able to sit in a feeding seat with good head control
- Formula or breast milk doesn't seem to be enough
- Your baby opens his mouth when offered a spoon
- His or her birth weight has doubled

The first solid foods

Traditionally, single-grained cereals are the first food introduced to infants, such as rice cereal. These foods are generally easier on the stomach and are low allergenic. The order in which foods are introduced after cereal may have no particular benefits to your baby, but it is recommended to introduce vegetables before fruits. Your baby may be less likely to enjoy vegetables if he or she is given fruit first. Peas, carrots, squash and sweet potatoes are common first vegetables introduced to infants after cereal.

Trying new foods

Introduce new foods one at a time. This will allow you to identify if a particular food causes an adverse reaction to your baby. It is recommended to follow the "Wait for 4" rule. Introduce a new food for at least four days before trying a new one to ensure your baby tolerates it well. Some professionals recommend waiting to introduce high allergenic foods, such as eggs, nuts or shellfish, until your baby is at least one year old. Talk to your network pediatrician about the best time to introduce these foods.

My baby's beverages

100% fruit juice can be introduced to your baby at six months or older, but juice is not a necessary part of your baby's diet. Limit the amount of juice your baby drinks to no more than six (6) oz per day, because too much can contribute to upset tummies, tooth decay and weight problems. Offer water instead if your baby seems thirsty between feedings. Typically, breast milk or formula provides all the fluid your baby needs. Discuss the use of water with your network pediatrician.

Choosing the right food

Many parents question whether to serve their baby store-purchased baby food or home-prepared baby food. The nutritive value of commercially prepared food is often thought to be less than that of homemade food, but many health professionals would disagree. Both types can be a healthy option for your baby. However, it is important to know that daycares in Mississippi will not serve home-prepared baby food to your baby as a Department of Health regulation. When considering which you should serve, know that there are advantages and disadvantages to both.

Advantages of homemade baby food:

- More control over additives in the food
- Less expensive than commercial baby food
- Opportunity for more variety as you are not limited to the manufacturer's options
- Conveniently use the same food as the rest of the family

Advantages of commercial baby food:

- Always the right consistency and texture
- More convenient for travel
- Less risk for foodborne illness
- Takes less time to prepare than home-made baby food

Your baby's healthy weight

Your network pediatrician will monitor your baby's growth and development at routine well baby exams. All babies develop on their own unique path, but the normal growth and development of an infant is somewhat predictable. Generally, babies are expected to double their birth weight in about five months and triple their birth weight by one year of age. Growth charts are used to assess your baby's weight, and the trend your baby consistently follows on the chart is often more important than where he or she falls. Always discuss your baby's growth and weight with your network pediatrician. Remember, encouraging healthy eating habits early in life will support a healthy weight later.

What's off limits?

Do not introduce cow's milk, honey or citrus fruits to your baby before he or she is a year old. Infant formula and breast milk are preferred over cow's milk for the first year, because cow's milk doesn't meet your baby's nutritional needs. Honey may contain a harmful food borne illness, called botulism, that is particularly dangerous to infants. Citrus fruits can cause painful diaper rashes and diarrhea. You don't want to feed your baby anything that requires chewing at this age, so be cautious when serving food to your baby from the family dinner table. Avoid foods that can be a choking hazard to your baby, such as grapes or hot dogs. Finger foods should not be introduced to your baby until he or she can sit up without support and can easily bring food to his or her mouth. Always talk to your network pediatrician about other foods your baby may need to avoid.

Healthy eating habits start early!

It is important to teach your baby healthy eating habits early in life. Encourage family meal time, even with your infant. Allow your baby to explore new tastes and textures with food. Never force your baby to eat something they don't like. Make meal time enjoyable! If your baby seems to dislike a particular food, introduce it again later. A new taste may need to be introduced up to eight times before a baby decides if they like or dislike it. Focus on introducing wholesome, healthy foods to your infant as they expand their taste palate. Help your baby develop a "healthy taste" for fresh fruits and vegetables by offering them first before you introduce added sugar and sweets. Remember, it's never too early to start being healthy!

Myth vs. Fact

Every mother wants to do what's right for her baby's health. See the myths and facts below to ease your concerns and confusion when introducing solid foods to your baby.

Myth

Fact

Solids should be introduced before four months of age.	A baby's digestive system is not ready for solid foods before four months of age. Introducing solid foods too early can put your baby at risk for food allergies later. Wait to introduce solids between 4 - 6 months of age.
Put rice cereal in your baby's bottle to help your baby sleep better at night.	According to Yale University, there is no connection between consumption of solid foods and improved sleeping patterns in babies. Furthermore, your baby is not ready for solids until he or she is at least four months of age. Solid foods should be introduced with a spoon instead of a bottle. A baby may be more likely to overeat if cereal is added to the bottle.
Single-grain cereals should be introduced to your baby before other solid foods.	According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, it does not matter which solid foods are introduced first. However, most doctors recommend starting with single-grain cereal because it is the least likely to cause an allergic reaction.
Cow's milk is ok once solid foods are introduced.	Cow's milk should not be introduced to your baby until he or she is at least one year old. Formula and breast milk are suitable for the first year. Cow's milk does not meet the nutritional needs of your baby during the first year and may cause an upset stomach.
It is ok to feed my baby from the family dinner table.	Many parents opt to serve homemade food to their baby, but there are some considerations when feeding your baby from the family dinner table. Remember to introduce only one new food at a time, and avoid foods that may be a choking hazard. Also, foods served to your baby early on should be prepared without added salt and seasonings.



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