

Introducing Solid Foods

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests waiting until your child is 6 months of age before introducing solids. Your baby is ready for strained/pureed foods when able to do **all** of these things:

- Hold head up and sit with support in an infant seat or highchair.
- Put fingers and toys in mouth.
- Show interest in food and open mouth when they see food.
- Close lips over spoon and does not push spoon out with tongue.
- Keep food in mouth and swallow (some dribbling early on is normal).
- Can turn head and mouth away to stop feeding.

Every baby will advance with feedings at their own rate. Don't worry if your baby refuses a meal. Avoid making your child clean the plate. Babies will decide how much they will eat.

The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages Responsive Feeding". When your baby is hungry, they may put hand to mouth, root, make sucking noises, clench fingers or fists, and/or flex arms and legs.

When your baby is full, they may start and stop feeding, spit out the bottle or food, slow down, fall asleep, fidget, close mouth, and/or turn head.

Remember, babies cry for many reasons and crying is not always a sign of hunger.

Once your baby learns to eat one food, wait at least 3 days before trying a different food. This gives you time to notice any allergic reactions such as rashes, diarrhea, or vomiting.

If your family has food allergies or your baby was born early, talk to your doctor before adding solid foods to your baby's diet.

Baby cereal has been the most common first food, but experts agree that foods may be started in any order. Babies who are mainly breastfed will get more of the iron and zinc they need if their first food is baby meat.

Avoid putting baby cereal in a bottle unless told to do so by your child's doctor.

Birth to 6 Months

Breast Milk and/or Iron-Fortified Formula

- 8-12 feedings per day
- Your baby is not ready for solid foods yet

6 Months

Breast Milk and/or Iron-Fortified Formula

- 4-6 feedings per day or 28-32 ounces

Iron-Fortified Cereal

- Start with plain rice, oat or barley cereal mixed with breast milk or formula; add in multigrain as tolerated

Meats

- Use plain, strained, pureed or baby meats, not "dinners" as they contain many ingredients
- Avoid meats high in nitrate and salt such as wieners, luncheon meats and bacon

Fruits and Vegetables

- Use pureed, plain fruits and vegetables.
- Do not offer juice unless told to do so by your doctor.

6 to 8 Months

Breast Milk and/or Iron-Fortified

Formula

- 3-5 feedings or 30-32oz of formula.
- Offer some breast milk or formula in a cup.

Vegetables

- Offer pureed vegetables with some soft, cooked, small pieces of vegetables mashed up with a fork or as finger food.

Fruits

- Offer different kinds of pureed fresh fruits.
- Avoid “desserts” and juice.

Meats, Egg, Beans

- Meats may have already been introduced.
- Offer mashed boiled or scrambled eggs and mashed beans.

Iron-Fortified Cereals or Enriched Hot Cereals

- Offer rice, oat, barley, wheat, couscous, quinoa, and multigrain cereals to provide variety in flavor and texture.

Toast, Crackers, Dry Cereal

- Amount varies.
- Iron-fortified, unsweetened cereals may be used as finger foods 1-2 times per day.
- Small pieces of toast or crackers.

9 to 12 Months

Breast Milk or Formula

- 4-5 feedings or about 22-32 oz formula.
- Keep offering a cup with the goal of transitioning to all cup feedings at meals.

Meats, Fish, Eggs, Beans, Tofu, Dairy (Cheese, Yogurt, Cottage Cheese)

- Offer a source of protein with each meal.
- Make sure meats are soft and cut into small pieces, no large chunks.

Fruits and Vegetables

- Offer fruits that require some chewing if your baby chews on cereal or crackers well.
- Offer more finger foods and less mashed food.
- Avoid fruit snacks.
- Offer a fruit and/or vegetable at every meal.

Allergies

There is no evidence that waiting to start soft foods like peanut butter, eggs, dairy, soy and/or fish prevents a food allergy. But, if you have a strong family history of food allergies, talk to your child’s doctor before starting these foods. Avoid giving cow’s milk to drink in place of formula or breast milk until 1 year of age. You can offer full fat yogurt, cottage cheese, or small pieces of cheese if there are no food allergies.

Heavy Metal Exposure

Most baby foods have low levels of heavy metals. The most concerning metals are arsenic, lead, and mercury. The best things to do are to provide a variety of foods (especially grains), stay alert for recalls, avoid brown rice, rice milk, and rice syrup, limit fruit juice, check well water and old pipes for lead, and offer fish like light tuna, salmon, cod, whitefish, and pollock.

Tips

Make sure your hands and all bowls, spoons and the highchair are clean.

Spoon the amount of food you think your baby will eat from the baby food container into a bowl. You can store the original container in the fridge for up to 2 days. After 2 days, throw it away. If you feed your baby from the baby food container, any food that is left, must be thrown away. Dipping your baby's spoon back in the jar after it has been in your baby's mouth will cause bacteria to grow and make it unsafe for your baby to eat.

Mealtimes will be messy. Relax and have fun! Throw an old tablecloth under the highchair to help with clean up.

Let your baby touch and handle food. Keep a clean rag ready.

If your baby does not like a food, offer it again at a different meal. It may take many times of trying a food before your baby decides to eat it.

Feeding Safety

Don't heat food or formula in the microwave because hot spots in the food or formula can burn your baby's mouth.

Don't feed your baby honey. Honey may contain bacterial spores which can make your baby sick.

Don't give your baby sweetened drinks like Kool-Aid, soda, punch or juice.

Don't put your baby to bed with a bottle. This leads to tooth decay.

Don't feed your baby foods high in nitrates/nitrites (beets, turnips, collard greens or spinach). These foods can make babies less than 6 months of age sick. (Store-bought baby food is checked for safety so this rule only applies to homemade baby food). Older babies can handle these foods.

You do not have to use store-bought baby food. You can blend your own baby food at home. Wash all fruits and vegetables and cook animal products well. If you want to learn more about making your own baby food, ask a registered dietitian.

Safe Finger Foods

- Cooked macaroni
- Graham crackers
- Dry toast pieces
- Small pieces of soft, well-cooked vegetables
- Dry cereal
- Bread sticks
- Arrowroot cookies
- Soft, peeled diced fruit
- Mandarin orange sections
- Small pieces of mild cheese

Avoid Foods that Cause Choking

- Nuts, seeds
- Popcorn
- Chips/pretzels
- Crunchy, thick peanut butter
- Hot dogs
- Grapes
- Raw vegetables
- Raisins/dried fruit
- Candy
- Hard candy
- Gum

To Find Out More

<http://www.healthychildren.org>

This site is sponsored by the American Academy of Pediatrics and is a good resource. This is a general timetable for introducing solid foods.

Who to Call

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions, please contact UW Health at the phone number listed below. You can also visit our website at www.uwhealth.org/nutrition

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children's Hospital (AFCH) can be reached at: **(608) 890-5500**.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 2/2024 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#207