



Introducing Complementary Foods

How do I tell if my baby is ready for complementary foods?

- Breastfeeding is a complete source of nutrition for the first 6 months of life. Our practice recommends exclusive breastfeeding for as long as possible during the first year of life. Many parents introduce formula feedings in the early months as well. Introducing pureed baby food helps babies to learn to enjoy new tastes and textures and is fun!
- Between 4 and 6 months, most babies are able to hold their heads up without wobbling and stop having a prominent “tongue thrust” reflex. When these milestones occur and parents feel ready it is time to start complementary foods.
- Always take your time and follow your baby’s cues. If your baby is interested and enjoying the experience, keep going. If not, wait a week or so and try again. There is no rush.

What foods should I introduce first and what is the schedule?

- There are many opinions about which foods to introduce first. The most important concept is to wait a few days in between new foods to make sure your baby doesn’t have an allergic reaction. Allergic reactions can include vomiting, frequent diarrhea, blood in stools, eczema/hives or other rash. If you suspect an allergic reaction, discontinue the food and call our office.
- We encourage a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, so this is a good place to start. Babies also need an additional source of iron in the diet, so enriched cereals and pureed meats are good to introduce as well. If you are vegetarian or prefer not to introduce meats or cereal, consider adding a multivitamin with iron such as [Poly Vi Sol with Iron](#), 1 ml dropperful each day, especially if you are breast feeding. Breast milk has a small amount of iron that is very well absorbed, but without an additional source of iron, many babies become anemic.
- Begin by trying a few spoonfuls of a food. As your baby gets the hang of it, work up to 2 meals a day including a fruit or vegetable and a source of iron at each feeding. You can offer the food at a meal time and include breast milk or formula before or after the pureed foods, whichever your baby prefers.,
- You can make your own baby food or buy the prepared ones, whichever you prefer. Stage 1 foods are a thin, smooth puree. Stage 2 foods are still a smooth puree, but are a little thicker, with more varieties. Stage 3 foods contain a chunk and smooth component. Most babies prefer self-feeding when they are ready for a chunky food.
- *NOTE: If you make your own baby food, be aware that home-prepared spinach, beets, green beans, squash, and carrots are not good choices during early infancy. They may contain large amounts of nitrates. Nitrates are chemicals that can cause an unusual type of **anemia** (low blood count) in young babies. Commercially prepared vegetables are safer because the manufacturers test for nitrates. Peas, corn, and sweet potatoes are better choices for home-prepared baby foods.*

Helpful References:

Books

Feed Me, I'm Yours by Vicki Lansky

Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense by Ellyn Satter

Cooking Light First Foods: Baby Steps to a Lifetime of Healthy Eating

Websites

Healthychildren.org

CHOA.org

Blogs

Incredibleinfant.com

<http://www.drgreene.com/infant-nutrition-health-center/>

