

INTRODUCTION OF SOLID FOODS

Proper nutrition, especially during the first year of life is essential to the general well being of your child. The following suggestions represent the most current thinking of the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Nutrition. Infants should be given breast milk or/and infant formula until at least 10-12 months of life. The onset of solid baby food feedings should be delayed until at least four months for formula fed infants, and 4-6 months in breast fed infants.

When solid foods are introduced, single ingredient foods should be chosen and started one at a time at 3-5 days intervals to permit for identification of food intolerance. Infant cereals, provide additional energy and iron, are a good choice for the first supplemental food given your infant. Single grain cereals, particularly rice and oatmeal are usually well tolerated. Poi may also be introduced now. Either "baby food poi"—in the jar or fresh bagged poi can be used in a diluted form. Dilute the poi with water or milk until the consistency will be easy for your infant to swallow. After cereals, other solid foods can be introduced. To avoid a strong preference for sweetness, it is recommended that yellow vegetables (yams, sweet potato, carrots, corn, squash), green vegetables, followed by fruits and meats are the suggested order of introduction. The fruits are added last because they are the easiest for the infant to accept and the least important nutritionally. Too often, if the sweeter fruits are offered first, the high protein foods and vegetables are rejected by the infant.

The gradual introduction of a variety of foods contributes to a nutritionally balanced diet and helps promote good eating habits. Strained foods prepared at home are nutritionally equivalent to those obtained commercially. Care must be taken to avoid spoilage of home prepared food and jarred baby food since neither contains preservatives. Would you want to eat leftovers three days old? Neither would your baby!

Salt and sugar are not added to most commercially prepared infant foods, but many combined dinners or desserts have added sugar. Read the labels carefully. Similarly, there is no need to add sugar or salt to fresh or frozen foods offered your baby. Canned foods which contain large amounts of salt and sugar are not suitable for home prepared baby foods.

Juices should be introduced only when your infant can sit alone and drink from a cup or spout. Juice should never be offered in a baby bottle. The juice will become addictive because of its sweetness, and will cause dental decay/cavities and decrease your baby's interest in food. Fresh fruit is a better alternative. Use only 100% fruit juice. I recommend diluting all juices with extra water. Delay all citrus fruits and juices (orange, pineapple, tangerine and grapefruit) until at least one year of age to avoid allergies and sensitivities.

Solid foods offered to infants less than one year of age should require a minimum of chewing. Young children do not chew food; they wet the food with saliva (spit), mash the food with their gums, and then gulp the food down. Unfortunately, several deaths from choking and aspiration have occurred in infants and toddlers in recent years. Foods, such as hot dogs, nuts, grapes, pop corn, sausages, carrots and round candies can be dangerous for your child.

To start, your hungry (and crying) baby needs its immediate hunger satisfied with breast milk or formula. Feed for just a few minutes, not an entire liquid feeding. Then offer a small quantity of the new food on a small, narrow, shallow bowled spoon with a long handle. Place the food towards the back of your infant's tongue. First, the food will probably be shoved forward. This is a natural reaction. Soon, your baby will learn how to use the muscles needed to suck and swallow food. Begin serving sizes at 1-2 teaspoonfuls, gradually increasing the amount as your infant shows interest and enthusiasm. It is impossible to predict how much any one infant will eat. Respond to your infant's cues and excitement.

Adding breast milk or formula to cereals and to strained foods at first introduction will give a familiar flavor for your infant to enjoy. Start with "soupy" consistency and slowly increase to a thicker feeding. If your infant rejects a food, do not force the issue. It may be reintroduced at a later time and enjoyed.

Infants may be fed from once to three solid meals per day, depending both on infant and parental preference. Select convenient times to enjoy feeding the baby. This will make family meal times in the future easier. The single grain cereals (oatmeal and rice) are an excellent source of iron and should be given at least once, if not more, times per day to help with brain development. Once the intake of baby foods is well established (3 meals per day), limit the intake of milk or formula to no more than 20-28 ounces per day. There will be more nutrients and vitamins in food than milk at this point in time.

Once an infant can sit alone, pull up to a stand, and move around holding onto furniture, it may be time to allow your child to try self feeding and select foods. "Finger foods," use of a utensil and drinking from a cup require dexterity and coordination. Children capable of these skills should be offered three meals per day and two snacks of a suitable size for their nutritional demands. However, sometimes their food intake may be huge, and then other times almost nothing. Unpredictable whims may make today's favorite meal unacceptable tomorrow. Studies continue to prove that children will, over time, select a balanced nutritious diet, if presented with a good variety of food. An increasing variety of taste, color, consistency and temperature will help to maintain an adequate nutritional intake.

Remember your child needs a balance diet. Include the four basic food groups:

- 1) Meat, fish, poultry and eggs
- 2) Dairy products, milk cheese and milk products
- 3) Fruits and vegetables
- 4) Cereal grains, potatoes and rice

Good nutrition is important for good health and brain development. Start life-long correct eating habits now for your child. Remember, parents decide what food is served and when food is served. Children decide whether or not to eat and how much to eat. Meal time is a chance for family time together, and is meant to be enjoyed.