



Messy Faces and Floors: Starting Solid Foods

It is already time to start thinking about introducing solid foods to your baby! Currently, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (AAAAI) recommends starting solids for infants around 4-6 months of age. There may be reasons that your pediatrician has recommended starting solids at a different time; please discuss this with your provider. Before you start solids, your baby should be able to hold their head up with good control. They should be able to sit in a high chair or infant seat easily. They should also be starting to show some interest in solid food. For example, your baby may be watching caregivers eat intently, all the while smacking their lips or reaching for your spoon.

General Recommendations about First Foods

- For most babies, it does not matter which foods you introduce first. Have fun with your choice! Traditionally, cereals are given first, but this is not necessary. Common foods to start are butternut squash, avocado, and banana.
- There is no medical evidence that foods need to be introduced in a specific order (for example, fruits can be given before vegetables and this does not necessarily mean that your child will never like vegetables). Introduction to proteins does not need to be delayed and can be an important part of an infant's diet.
- Store bought or home-prepared foods are both fine.
- Offer your baby a variety of nutritious foods.
- Concentrated sweets and juices should largely be avoided (though juice can be important to help with constipation should this occur; discuss this with your pediatrician).
- A small amount of flavoring or spice such as cinnamon, cumin, salt, etc. is fine
- It is important to offer iron-containing foods to your infant on a regular basis (at least a few times per week), particularly if your infant is otherwise exclusively breast-fed. This may include beans, green/leafy veggies, red meats, and/or eggs.
- Vitamin D supplementation for infants should continue until your infant is drinking whole milk that is fortified with vitamin D
- Start offering your child a few ounces of water per day in a sippy cup when you start introducing solid foods

Allergenic Foods

- Talk to your provider if members of your family have food allergies. Foods that people are commonly allergic to are peanuts, tree nuts, soy, milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, and wheat.
- In most cases, even having a family history of a food allergy does not mean that this food should be withheld from your baby. In fact, emerging evidence suggests that early introduction of these foods may actually be helpful to prevent the development of food allergies, so these foods should not be specifically avoided for most babies. There are some exceptions (for example, if there are nut allergies in a first degree relative such as a parent or sibling), and this should be discussed with your pediatrician prior to introducing these foods.

Foods to avoid

- **Infectious Risk foods:** do not give your infant the following foods to your infant due to risk of infections:
 - Honey – honey should be avoided until after 12 months of age due to the risk of botulism. The risk of botulism from honey does not go away with heating or freezing so it should not be an ingredient in food given to your baby.
 - Raw or unpasteurized dairy
 - Undercooked proteins such as runny eggs, pink-centered meats (especially ground meat), or undercooked poultry.
- **Choking hazards:** Initially, foods should be pureed or very soft and mashed. As your infant becomes more adept at eating foods, soft finger foods can be introduced such as small pieces of banana, scrambled eggs, well-cooked pasta, and crackers. Usually, infants are ready for this around 8-9 months of age. Finger foods such as whole hot dogs, whole grapes, whole nuts and seeds, popcorn, raw vegetables, hard/goeey/sticky candy, or large chunks of meat, cheese, or nut butters should be avoided until your child is four years of age. If given sooner, these foods should be sliced or chopped into small pieces (for example, grapes can be given but should be cut into quarters).
- While dairy products are fine (yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese, etc.), do not give your infant liquid milk until 12 months of age as this increases the risk of anemia. Drinking goat's milk has an even higher risk of anemia and should also be avoided.

Establishing Good Eating Habits—How Much Do I Feed my Baby?

- Start by sitting your child upright in a high chair or infant chair. Avoid distractions such as toys and screens. You want your baby to establish mindful, focused eating where they listen to their own hunger and fullness cues.
- Follow your baby's lead to help determine how much to give them. If they are interested and readily taking the food, keep offering it to them! If they are turning their head away or spitting out the food, they may be done. Keep in mind that some babies are very excited about food and others are slow to warm up. Both approaches to food are healthy and normal!
- Offer your baby food first and then breast milk or formula afterwards (this way they don't fill up on liquids prior to eating the solids)
- Make at least one meal a family meal so that infants can learn about the social aspects of mealtime. It does not matter if this is breakfast, lunch, or dinner—whatever works for your family is fine.
- How fast you add solid meals somewhat depends on your baby's level of interest. Most babies are eating a variety of foods that includes proteins, dairy products, fruits/veggies, and grains 1-2 months after starting solids. By 9 months of age, most infants are eating 2-3 solid meals per day. By 12 months of age, most children are eating 3 meals per day with 1-2 snacks.
- You should continue to offer your infant breast milk and/or formula until 12 months of age (thereafter you may transition to whole milk instead).

This handout is meant to serve as a guide for you as you begin to offer solid foods to your baby. Please talk to your provider about any additional questions or concerns you may have. Most of all, have fun and happy eating!