



Introducing Solids to Your Baby

When Do I Feed My Baby?

During the first 4 to 6 months, a baby requires only breastmilk or iron-fortified infant formula. Babies' swallowing and digestive systems are not developmentally ready to handle solid foods until they are between 4 to 6 months of age. A baby's weight or age alone does not determine their readiness for solid foods. Each baby develops at a different rate.

When a baby is ready to start solids, they can:

- Hold their neck steady and sit with support in a highchair or infant seat.
- Keep food in their mouth and swallow it, rather than pushing it back out onto their chin.
- Begin to show their desire for food, by opening their mouth and leaning forward.

How Do I Feed My Baby?

When feeding your baby, give them your full attention. Start with half a spoonful or less and talk to your baby throughout the process ("Mmm, see how good this is?"). Your baby may not know what to do at first. Try diluting it the first few times, then gradually thicken the texture. Increase the amount of food gradually, with just a teaspoon or two to start. Do not make your baby eat if they cry or turn away when you feed them. Babies should be fed when they are hungry and not restricted to a rigid schedule.

It is important for your baby to get used to the process of eating - sitting up, taking food from a spoon, resting between bites, and stopping when full. Try to eat together at the table. These early experiences will help your child learn good eating habits throughout life. Your baby is likely to play with their food. Although it's messy, hands-on fun helps fuel development. Offer your baby a spoon to hold and a cup to drink from and encourage them to use it independently as dexterity improves.

Remember that starting solid foods is a gradual process and at first your baby will still be getting most of their nutrition from breast milk or formula. As your baby approaches age 1, offer your baby three meals a day, plus one or two snacks with mashed or chopped versions of whatever you are eating.

What Do I Feed My Baby?

For most babies it doesn't matter what the first solid foods are. By 4 to 6 months babies need supplemental iron from foods other than breastmilk or formula, such as meats, legumes, or iron-fortified cereal. Start with single foods in a pureed consistency - cereals, fruits, vegetables, legumes, and meat are all okay. Once your baby learns to eat one food, gradually give them other foods. Don't introduce 2 new foods at once, this would help alleviate any confusion as to which food caused an allergic reaction, were one to occur. If your baby turns away from a new food, don't push it. Simply try again another time. Repeated exposure can help ensure variety in your baby's diet.

Once your baby can sit up and bring their hands or other objects to their mouth, you can give them finger foods to help them learn to feed themselves. To avoid choking, make sure anything you give your baby is soft, easy to swallow, and cut into small pieces - soft fruits, vegetables, pasta, cheese, well-cooked meat, baby crackers, and dry cereal.

Small amounts of water may be offered in a cup once solid foods begin, usually around 6 months of age. Babies under 12 months should continue to get most of their fluids from breast milk or formula, and water should not replace feedings. Limit water to a few ounces per day and avoid juice during the first year of life.



There are a few foods that are **not yet safe** for your baby:

- **Cow's Milk:** Don't offer cow's milk or honey before age because it doesn't meet an infant's nutritional needs and can increase the risk of iron deficiency. Cheese and yogurt are fine.
- **Honey:** Honey might contain spores that can cause a serious illness known as infant botulism.
- **Foods with risk of choking:** These foods are highest risk for choking and should be avoided:
 - Hot dogs
 - Chunks of meat
 - Chunks of cheese
 - Grapes
 - Raw vegetables
 - Fruit chunks (unless cut into small pieces)
 - Seeds
 - Nuts
 - Popcorn
 - Hard Candy
 - Peanut Butter
 - Marshmallows

If you want to give your baby fresh food, use a blender or food processor, or just mash softer foods with a fork. All fresh foods should be cooked with no added salt or sugar. Refrigerate any unused foods and look for any signs of spoilage before offering again. Fresh foods are not bacteria-free, so they will spoil more quickly.

After each new food, watch for any allergic reactions such as swelling around mouth, diarrhea, rash, or vomiting. **Though an allergic reaction is uncommon, we recommend that you have oral cetirizine (Children's liquid Zyrtec) on-hand before starting solid foods.** If any signs of allergic reaction occur, stop using the new food and consult with your child's provider. Oral cetirizine (Zyrtec) may be recommended.

Children's Liquid Zyrtec (cetirizine) Strength = 1 mg/1mL
<u>Dose per weight and age</u> 6-11 months = 2.5 mg = 2.5 milliliters once/day 12-23 months = 2.5 - 5 mg = 2.5 - 5 milliliters once/day

Though a severe allergic reaction is unlikely, we want you to be prepared. **Call 911, rather than us** if you baby has **hives AND another allergic reaction symptom** (like vomiting, trouble breathing, wheezing, swelling to face)

To help prevent food allergies, parents were once told to avoid feeding young children highly allergenic foods such as eggs, fish, peanuts, and tree nuts. Today, however, there's no convincing evidence that avoiding these foods during early childhood will help prevent food allergies and early exposure may lower the risk of developing an allergy. If any close relatives have a food allergy talk with your doctor before offering that food.

When your baby starts eating solid foods, his stools will become more solid and variable in color and may develop a stronger odor. If your baby's meals are not strained, their stools may contain undigested pieces of food. All of this is normal. Your baby's digestive system is still immature and needs time before it can fully process these new foods. If the stools are extremely loose, watery, or full of mucus, however, it may mean the digestive tract is irritated. In this case, reduce the amount of solids and introduce them more slowly. If the stools continue to be loose, watery, or full of mucus, consult with your provider.

Enjoy your baby's sloppy tray, gooey hands, and sticky face! You're building the foundation for a lifetime of healthy eating.

