

FEEDING and ADVANCING THE DIET

Starting your infant on solid foods should be an enjoyable experience. It is recommended that you wait until 4-6 months of age to begin solids. Discuss with your provider the best timing for you to introduce solids to your baby. Contrary to popular belief, feeding solids will not make your baby sleep through the night any sooner and starting solids prior to age 4 months has been linked to obesity. There is no right or wrong way to introduce foods to your baby. We offer some general recommendations that seem to work well for many babies. Remember, as your infant increases her solid intake, milk intake will naturally decrease.

We recommend introducing one new food every 2-3 days so if your child has a reaction to that food, you can determine the cause. If you are concerned about food allergy or have a family history of food allergy, you may discuss this with your provider. In general, avoiding allergenic foods like nuts and eggs is no longer recommended. In fact, earlier introduction of foods may actually protect your child from allergies. This is thought to be especially true for wheat. In two studies, babies who were fed wheat between 4 and 6 months, while still breastfeeding, had a reduced risk of gluten (wheat) allergy.

You can start any food that you like. There is no recommended plan. The only recommendation is that you don't serve honey or whole milk before age 1 year. You may start with any pureed food, , avocado, veggies (sweet potatoes, squash), fruit (bananas), legumes (lentils or beans), or meats. Please make sure to include iron rich foods like meats, beans, lentils, dark leafy greens as iron is essential for your baby's development at this age. We do not usually recommend commercially prepared baby cereals since they are of little nutritional value

Offer pureed foods in between milk feedings. A breakfast feeding may be at 8:30 or 9 am if your baby has milk at 7am and then again around 10 or 11. This way, your baby is not super hungry and frantic, looking for what he really wants (milk). But he also is not stuffed from a recent feeding.

Generally, parents start feeding with a spoon. Do not mix food or cereal in a bottle (unless instructed by your provider). It is not unusual for your baby to take only 1-2 teaspoons of pureed food in the beginning. As your baby begins to enjoy solids and swallows well, you may increase the amount and thicken the consistency. Infants generally take between 2-4 tablespoons of purees per feeding, but let your child's appetite be your guide.

Once your child is eating baby food well and able to sit up well without support, allow her to try to feed herself finger foods like small pieces of avocado or steamed sweet potato. When she can accurately get them into her own mouth unaided, she is ready for finger foods. Choose soft foods that she can mash with her gums and cut them into irregular pieces about the size of a pea, to prevent choking. The presence or absence of teeth does not matter as your baby can mash soft foods quite well with her gums. If you can mash the food between your thumb and fore finger, it is soft enough to feed to your baby. You may start exposing your baby to foods from your own plate now, as long as it is manageable for your baby. There is no absolute set time at which additional meals are added to your child's eating schedule. Instead, observe her development for clues as to when she is ready for more food. As your child becomes more competent and eager to eat (she anticipates the food by widening mouth and eyes and keeps at least half of the spoonful of food in her mouth) you may add more meals throughout the day. Most infants are eating 3 meals a day by 9 months.

If you give your baby meats, we recommend using real meat from your own table rather than baby food meat. You must ensure it is well cooked and properly stored according to safe food handling guidelines. As with other table foods make sure it is soft and diced small to prevent choking. Note that preserved meats such as hotdogs, luncheon meats, bacon, ham, and sausages are high in fat, salt preservatives, and are associated with health problems in adults. Look for the words "nitrate" or "nitrite" on food labels to determine if the meat is preserved.

At around one year of age, give your child age-appropriate utensils to practice using a spoon and fork. She will probably still need your help with eating. You can also offer more finger foods. By the time your baby is 1 year old, she should be eating about 3 meals and occasionally 2-3 snacks a day. This should include a balance of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, healthy fats and protein. After her first birthday, if she is no longer nursing, 16-20 ounces of whole milk is sufficient. Most children will be eating table foods by now. This is a good incentive for parents to eat healthy. Family meals are a great way to bond and to maintain healthy lifestyles.

Things to remember:

- Avoid anything your child may choke on. You should never give whole nuts, seeds, raw carrots, raw celery, uncut hotdogs, candy, uncut grapes, popcorn or any small hard food that can cause choking. Always observe your infant when she is eating to ensure she is comfortable and safe.
- Avoid honey until age 1

Making your own baby food:

You may certainly make your own baby food. Choose healthy foods, including fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes and tender cuts of meat. Thoroughly rinse fruits and vegetables and remove any seeds and stem. Steam your produce until it is soft enough to mash. For meats, bake or cook the meat on a stove-top until it is well-cooked to avoid food poisoning (usually 175 degrees). Cut the food into squares and use a food processor or immersion blender to puree it. Homemade foods given before 6 months of age should be strained or sieved before feeding to your baby. There is no need to add sugar, salt, or strong seasonings. You can freeze the food in ice cube trays and defrost it in the refrigerator or microwave oven when you are ready to use it.

Juices:

In general, children do not need juice. They should be getting adequate fruits and vegetables from their diet. Juice is not a healthy alternative to fruit.

The picky eater:

Do not become disheartened if your child becomes picky about eating. Your baby may become fiercely independent about feeding. This is very normal! Offer your child finger foods so that she may feed herself. Make sure you maintain healthy options!

We highly recommend against engaging your toddler in a battle over food. Accept the mess on the floor—it is part of the process. Continue to offer healthy options multiple times a day. Toddlers may need 5-6 “meals” or snacks a day and the amount they eat may vary from day to day. Avoid salty snacks, highly concentrated sweets (e.g. cookies, juice, or soda) and caffeine. Studies show it may take 10-12 exposures to a new food for a child to acquire a taste for it, so keep on offering those healthy options. Food, especially sweets and desserts, and the withholding of foods, should not be used as reward or punishment.

Check out www.doctorangel.com for more on food, nutrition and recipes.