

Solid Foods (Baby Foods)

Definition

- This topic deals with how to introduce solid (baby) foods to young infants
- Baby foods are strained or pureed foods
- They are called solid foods only because they are not liquids

Health Information

Types of Baby Foods

Cereals

- Cereals are usually the first solid food added to your baby's diet. The main reason is they are easy to digest. Babies only getting breast milk also can develop anemia from low iron. This is prevented by starting cereal at 6 months. Most baby cereals are iron-fortified.
- Mix the cereal with breast milk or formula. The cereal mixture needs to be a semi-liquid. It can be mixed a little thicker as your baby becomes better at swallowing it.
- Cereals should be fed with a small spoon. Don't mix cereal in the baby's bottle. This is because an infant should be taught to differentiate between what he eats and what he drinks.
- Start with rice, barley or oatmeal cereal. A mixed cereal should be added to your baby's diet only after each kind of cereal in the mixed cereal has been tried separately.

Vegetables and Fruits

- Next, introduce strained or pureed vegetables and fruits to your baby. The order in which you add these foods to your baby's diet is not important.
- However, introduce only one new food at a time.
- Try to wait 3 days before starting another new food. That way if your baby develops diarrhea, you will know what may have caused it.
- For all babies, introduce pure vegetable baby foods (no added fruit) before 9 months. Reason: may prevent later dislike of vegetables and bitter tastes.

Meats and High Protein Foods

- Next give strained or pureed meats. Other protein-rich foods include eggs, beans and peas. These solids can add to your infant's iron intake.
- Yogurt and cheese are also good protein sources (but low iron).
- Meats should definitely be added by 8 months at the latest. (Except for vegans)

Homemade Baby Foods

- Between 8 and 12 months of age, introduce your baby to mashed table foods. They contain small chunks. They are called stage 3 foods or junior foods.
- You can make your own baby foods if you want. Use a baby-food grinder or regular blender. Be sure to add enough water to get a consistency that your baby can easily swallow.
- For individual portions, you can pour these homemade baby foods into ice cube trays and freeze them. Then remove them and store them in plastic freezer bags. Defrost them and serve as needed.

Baby Food by Texture

- Stage 1 baby foods are pureed, smooth, runny foods. They are also single ingredient.
- Stage 2 baby foods are creamy but thicker in texture. They may also contain multiple ingredients such as mixed fruits or mixed veggies.
- Stage 3 baby foods contain some bits or chunks of food. They are comparable to mashed up table foods.

Preventing Food Allergies by Early Introduction of High Risk Foods

- The advice for preventing food allergies has changed in recent years. (AAP).
- Current advice: Introduce high risk foods after 6 months of age. Introduce normal solid foods like cereals first for a few weeks. Add new foods one at a time. Try to wait 3 days before starting another.
- Eggs can be mashed up. Peanuts can be given as peanut-containing puffs. If peanut butter is used it must be mixed into baby foods in small amounts. Continue eggs and peanut containing puffs at least weekly.
- Exception to early introduction: severe eczema. Talk with your child's doctor first.
- Older advice was to avoid high risk foods such as eggs until 2 years. Avoid peanut butter and fish/shellfish until 3 years. Research has shown that advice was wrong.
- Early introduction of these foods reduces the risk of food allergies. For example: early introduction of peanut butter puffs reduces peanut allergy by 90%.

Foods to Avoid for Babies

- Honey: Never give your child honey during the first year of life. Reason: It can rarely cause infant botulism, a muscle weakness disease.
- Cow's milk (whole milk): Avoid during the first year of life. Reason: in some babies it can cause anemia. Cow's milk formulas are fine.
- Choking on Foods: Avoid any foods your child might choke on. Some high-risk foods are grapes and hot dogs. These may block the airway and cause sudden death. Raw vegetables (such as carrots) and peanuts should be avoided until 4 years old. Reason: Young children can't chew them and they could be inhaled into the lungs. Also avoid large pieces of any sticky food (such as peanut butter).
- Heavy metals in trace amounts are found in the foods we eat. That includes some baby foods. The tiny amounts eaten are harmless. They can't be completely avoided. Reason: Heavy metals are normally present in the soil and water. They are absorbed by plants and get into the food chain. (AAP)

Iron Rich Foods

- Throughout our lives we need iron in our diet to prevent anemia. Certain foods are especially good sources of iron. Red meats, fish, and poultry are best.
- Some young children will only eat lunch meats, such as ham slices.
- Adequate iron is also found in iron-enriched cereals and beans of all types. Egg yolks, peanut butter, raisins, and other dried fruits are iron rich. Other good foods are plum juice and dark leafy greens.

Vitamins: When They Are Needed

- Formula fed babies get all the vitamins they need from the formula.
- Breast-fed babies need a vitamin D supplement. Start 400 units per day at 2 weeks of age. You can buy Vitamin D drops in most drug stores.
- After your child is 1 and eating a balanced diet, added vitamins are usually not needed.
- If your child is a picky eater, give him 1 chewable vitamin pill. Do this at least twice a week. Gummy vitamins are not as helpful. Reason: They contain all the vitamins, but not the minerals.

Care Advice

1. **Baby Foods: When to Start**

- Breast milk and formulas meet all of your baby's nutritional needs until 6 months or longer. Introducing strained foods earlier just makes feeding more complicated.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends to exclusively breastfeed for 6 months. Wait until then to start baby foods.
- For formula fed infants, the AAP recommends starting baby foods around 6 months of age.
- For breastfed babies, move on to more iron-enriched baby foods before 7 months.
- For all babies, introduce pure vegetable baby foods (no added fruit) before 9 months. Reason: may prevent later dislike of vegetables and bitter tastes.
- Which baby foods you start first is not important. Just introduce one new food at a time.
- Try to wait 3 days in between starting another new baby food.

2. **Spoon Feeding: When to Start**

- Do not start spoon feeding until your baby has the following physical skills:
- Can sit with some support in a high chair or feeding seat.
- Can hold his head steady. Has strong neck muscles and good head support.
- Knows to open the mouth at the sight of food.

3. **How to Spoon Feed:**

- Teaching your baby to take food off a spoon and swallow it will take some time.
- Use a small baby spoon.
- Put the spoon just inside the mouth. Wait for your baby to close his mouth around it.
- Then slowly pull the spoon straight out while he sucks the food off the spoon. The upper lip and sucking will keep most of the food inside.
- You may need to add a little extra milk to make it thinner and easier to suck.
- Some need to drink a little milk first to take the edge off their appetite.
- Some children constantly bat at the spoon. Others try to hold it while you are trying to feed them. These children need to be distracted. Use finger foods or give them another spoon to play with.
- By 15 to 18 months of age, most children can use a spoon on their own. They no longer need your help to eat. The spoon now belongs to them.

4. **Avoid Gagging:**

- Gagging means you need to slow down. Give smoother foods or smaller amounts. It may mean that you need to delay starting solids.
- Most babies need to be 6 months old before they can easily swallow purees.
- Gagging is a protective reflex. It keeps food from getting into the airway. It prevents choking.

5. **How Much to Give:**

- Start with a small amount on the spoon. At first your baby may just want a taste. Then gradually work up to larger portions.
- During the first year, 2 to 4 tablespoons (1 to 2 ounces) of each kind of food per meal is common.
- If your child is still hungry after finishing that amount, serve her more.
- If your baby doesn't like a new food, stop. You can tell because she spits it out. She may also refuse to open her mouth after a taste. Don't offer that food again for a few weeks.

6. **Finger Foods: When and How to Start**

- Finger foods are small, bite-size pieces of soft foods.
- They can be introduced when your child develops a pincer grip. That means the ability to pick objects up between the thumb and first finger. A pincher grip usually develops between 9 and 10 months.
- Most babies love to feed themselves. Most babies will not be able to feed themselves with a spoon until 15 months. Finger foods are the way to keep your baby actively involved in the feeding process.
- Favorite finger foods are dry cereals (Cheerios, Rice Krispies, etc.). Others are small pieces of soft cheese or scrambled eggs. Canned fruit (peaches or pears) or fresh bananas are also good if cut into small pieces. Other choices are crackers, cookies, and breads. Be sure to include peanut-flavored Cheerios or puffs.

7. **Snacks: When to Start**

- Once your baby goes to 3 main meals a day, he may need a small snack. This will help tide him over between meals.
- Most babies begin this pattern between 6 and 9 months of age.
- The midmorning and midafternoon snack should be a nutritious, non-milk food.
- Fruits and dry cereals are recommended.
- If your child is not hungry at mealtime, cut back on the snacks or eliminate them.

8. **Table Foods: When to Start**

- Your child should be eating the same meals you eat by about 1 year.
- This assumes that your diet is a well-balanced one. Avoid added salt.
- Carefully dice any foods that would be difficult for your baby to chew.
- Mash up some foods with a fork.
- Avoid foods that he could choke on. Foods such as raw carrots, candy, peanuts, and popcorn should be avoided.

Call Your Doctor If

- Your child won't eat baby foods
- You think your baby has a food allergy
- You think your child needs to be seen
- You have other questions or concerns

Pediatric Care Advice

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