

Starting Solids

How do I know my baby is ready to try solids?

Signs of readiness include:

- ★ Open their mouth for the spoon.
- ★ Sit with support.
- ★ Show good head and neck control.
- ★ Be interested in the foods you eat.

How do I feed my baby?

Start with half a spoonful or less and talk to your baby through the process (“Mmm, see how good this is?”). Your baby may not know what to do at first. They may look confused, wrinkle their nose, roll the food around inside their mouth, or reject it altogether.

One way to make eating solids for the first time easier is to give your baby a little breast milk, formula, or both first; then switch to a very small half-spoonful of food; and finish with more breast milk or formula. This will prevent your baby from getting frustrated when she is very hungry.

Do not be surprised if most of the first few solid-food feedings wind up on your baby’s face, hands, and bib. Increase the amount of food gradually, with just a teaspoonful or two to start. This allows your baby time to learn how to swallow solids.

Which food should I give my baby first?

For most babies, it does not matter what the first solid foods are. By tradition, single-grain cereals are usually introduced first. However, there is no medical evidence that introducing solid foods in any particular order has an advantage for your baby. Although many pediatricians will recommend starting vegetables before fruits, there is no evidence that your baby will develop a dislike for vegetables if fruit is given first! Babies are born with a preference for sweets, the order of introducing foods does not change this.

Baby cereals are available premixed in individual containers or are dry. You can add breastmilk, formula, or water. Whichever type of cereal you use, make sure that it is for babies and is iron fortified.

When can my baby try other food?

Once your baby learns to eat one food, gradually give them other food. Give your baby one new food at a time. Generally, meats and vegetables contain more nutrients per serving than fruits or cereals.

There is no evidence that waiting to introduce baby- safe (soft) allergy- causing foods (such as eggs, dairy, soy, peanuts, or fish) beyond 4 to 6 months of age prevents food allergy. If you believe your baby has an allergic reaction to a food (such as diarrhea, rash, or vomiting) talk with your baby’s provider about the best choices for a diet.

Within a few months of starting solid foods, your baby's daily diet should include a variety of foods. This includes breast milk or formula or both, meats, cereals, vegetables, fruits, eggs, and fish.

When can I give my baby finger food?

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 prevent choking, make sure anything you give your baby is soft, easy to swallow, and cut into small pieces. Some examples include small pieces of banana, wafer type of cookies or crackers, scrambled eggs, well-cooked pasta, well-cooked finely chopped chicken, and well-cooked cut up potatoes or peas.

If you want to give your baby fresh food, use a blender or food processor, or just mash softer foods with a fork. Although you can feed your baby raw mashed bananas, most other fruits and vegetables should be cooked until they are soft. Refrigerate any food you do not use and look for any signs of spoilage before giving it to your baby. Fresh foods are not bacteria-free, so they will spoil more quickly than food from a can or jar.

NOTE: do not give your baby any food that requires chewing at this age. Do not give your baby any food that can be a choking hazard, including hot dogs (including meat stickers or baby food hot dogs), nuts and seeds, chunks of meat or cheese, whole grapes, popcorn, chunks of peanut butter, raw vegetables, fruit chunks (such as apple), and hard gooey or sticky candy.

What changes can I expect after my baby starts solids?

When your baby starts eating solid foods, their stools will become more solid and variable in color. Because of the added sugars and fats, they will have a much stronger odor too. Peas and other green vegetables may turn the stool a deep-green color, beets may make it red. If your baby's meals are not strained, their stools may contain undigested pieces of food, especially hulls of peas or corns, and the skin of tomatoes or other vegetables. 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 your baby's doctor.

Does my baby need water?

Healthy babies do not need extra water. Breast milk, formula, or both provide all the fluids they need. However, with the introduction of solid foods, water can be added to your baby's diet. Also, a small amount of water may be needed in very hot weather. If you live in an area where the water has fluoride, drinking water will also help prevent future tooth decay. This is not a substitute for breast milk or formula but will help get them familiar with drinking water. At 6 months old, you can start to introduce water in an open cup or a straw cup.

Good eating habits start early

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. These early experiences will help your child learn good eating habits throughout life.

Encourage family meals from the first feeding. When you can, the whole family should eat together. Research suggests that having dinner together as a family on a regular basis has positive effects on the development of children.

Remember to offer a good variety of healthy foods that are rich in nutrients your baby needs. Watch your baby for cues that they have had enough to eat. Do not overfeed.

References

All information is from the American Academy of Pediatrics parenting website [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org)