

Introduction of Solids

Determining Readiness

Most babies are ready to eat solid foods at 4 to 6 months of age. Before this age, instead of swallowing the food, babies push their tongues against the spoon or food. This tongue-pushing reflex is necessary when they are breastfeeding or drinking from a bottle. Most babies stop doing this at about 4 months of age. Energy needs of babies begin to increase around this age as well, making this a good time to introduce solids.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends mothers breastfeed exclusively for at least 4 months but preferably 6 months and continue breastfeeding after introduction of solid foods until 12 months of age.

Your baby is ready to try solid foods when he can do all of these things:

- Sit up with support
- Hold his head steady
- Put his fingers or toys in mouth
- Show he wants food by opening his mouth
- Close his lips over the spoon
- Show he doesn't want food by turning his head away
- Keep food in his mouth and swallow it

How to Start Solids

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. Though 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, and the order of introducing foods does not change this. If your baby has been mostly breastfeeding, he may benefit from baby food made with meat, which contains more easily absorbed sources of iron and zinc that are needed by 4 to 6 months of age. Remember if you are breastfeeding, it is recommended that you supplement your infant with vitamin D starting at birth and iron starting between 4 and 6 months.

Baby cereals are available premixed in individual containers or dry, to which you can add breast milk, formula, or water. Premixed baby cereals are convenient, while dry cereals are richer in iron and allow you to control the thickness of the cereal. Whichever type of cereal you use,



make sure that it is made for babies because these cereals contain extra nutrients your baby needs at this age.

When you determine your baby is ready, try feeding him a little bit of solid food. Consider the following when you do this:

- Start with baby cereal. Try rice, oatmeal or barley.
- Mix it with breast milk or formula.
- Make it thin at first. Later you can make it thicker.
- Feed with a spoon.
- Your baby needs to be sitting up.
- Hold spoon near baby's mouth and wait for him to look at it. Then put a little bit on his lips so he can taste it.
- Your baby will begin to open his mouth to let you know he's ready.
- If your baby doesn't eat it, wait a week and try again.

6-12 Months of Age

Your baby will move through 4 stages of food:

- Smooth (strained or pureed)
- Mashed (smooth – few lumps)
- Chopped (more lumps)
- Tiny pieces of food

Be sure your baby can chew and swallow foods from one stage before moving on to the next one. These stages do not necessarily match stages on commercial baby foods.

Food Allergies

Some pediatricians recommend against giving eggs and fish in the first year of life because of a perceived risk of allergic reactions, but there is no evidence that introducing these nutrient-dense foods after 4 to 6 months of age determines whether your baby will be allergic to them. Give your baby one new food at a time, and wait at least 2 to 3 days before starting another. After each new food, watch for any allergic reactions such as diarrhea, rash, or vomiting. If any of these occur, stop using the new food and consult with your child's doctor.

Within a few months of starting solid foods, your baby's daily diet should include a variety of foods each day that may include the following:

- Breast milk and/or formula
- Meats
- Cereal
- Vegetables
- Fruits
- Eggs and fish

