

Feeding Your Child

A Guide to Your Child's Nutritional Needs



Starting Solids and Transitioning to Table Foods





Starting Solids and Table Foods

When Should Solids be Introduced?

For most infants, breast milk and/or iron-fortified formula provide all the nutrients required for the first 6 months of life. It is recommended to delay the addition of solid foods until your baby is **6 months of age**. However, each child's readiness depends on their own rate of development. Some essential skills needed before successfully starting solids include:

- ♦ **Loss of tongue-thrusting reflex.** Before this age, babies push their tongues out against food instead of swallowing. When your baby stops doing this, they can then start to take food from a spoon and swallow.
- ♦ **Opens mouth when food is near.** Your baby may be ready for solids when they watch you eat, reach for your food and/or seems eager to be fed.
- ♦ **Holds head up.** Your baby should be able to sit with support and have good head control before introducing solids.

Your baby may take a little while to “learn” how to eat solids. **During these months, you will still be providing your baby's usual feedings of breast milk or iron-fortified formula (24-32 oz per 24 hours) to meet their basic nutritional needs.** This is an opportunity to introduce eating as a pleasant experience and expose them to a variety of flavors and textures. If your baby is not interested, wait a few days or a week and try again. Don't force it.

Around this time you may also experience a **“nursing strike.”** Your baby is much more aware of their surroundings now and gets distracted much easier. Don't give up! Nursing strikes generally don't last long; continue to offer the breast often.

Where Do I Begin with Solids?

- ♦ **Pick a time of day when your baby is not tired or upset.** You want your baby to be a little hungry, but not starving. Try solids about an hour after a normal feeding of breast milk or formula.
- ♦ **Have your baby sit in an upright infant seat.** Infants who sit well, usually around 6 months of age, can be placed in a high chair with a safety strap.
- ♦ **Start with single-ingredient foods.** Try vegetables, fruits, meats or whole grains.
- ♦ **Introduce one new food at a time.** At first, wait 3-4 days before trying something new. This will allow you to identify foods that your baby may be sensitive or allergic to.
- ♦ **Keep trying.** Research shows it takes repeated exposures (up to 10-15 times) before a baby accepts some new foods. If your baby doesn't like a particular food, try it again another time.
- ♦ **Think small.** Infants have small stomachs and need small, frequent feedings.
- ♦ **Start with 1 teaspoon of food.** Gradually give more food as your baby accepts it, recognizing when they indicate they are full.

- ♦ **Learn to understand your baby's hunger and fullness cues.** By responding to these cues, you will be able to help your baby understand their own feelings of hunger and fullness.

“Feed me!”

- **Opens mouth and moves towards spoon**
- **Tries to swipe food toward mouth**
- **Gestures – nods, points or grabs spoon**

“No more, please!”

- **Turns head or pushes away from spoon**
- **Spits out familiar foods or pushes them away**
- **Becomes distracted; notices surroundings more**

Changes After Starting Solids

When your baby starts eating solid foods, their stools will become more solid, variable in color and will have a stronger odor. Spinach and other green vegetables may turn the stool a deep-green color; beets may make stool and/or urine red. If your baby's meals are not strained, you may notice undigested pieces of food in the stool like hulls of peas or corn. All of this is normal!

First Foods

There is no medical evidence that introducing solids in any particular order has an advantage for your baby. Experiment with a variety of developmentally appropriate, nutrient-dense fruits, vegetables, whole grains and proteins. Within a few months of starting solids, your baby's daily diet should include a variety of foods each day that include:



Breast milk and/or formula



Meats and/or beans



Fish and shellfish



Vegetables and fruits



Whole grains









Eggs

Introduce High Allergen Foods Early On

Potentially allergenic foods (e.g. peanuts, egg, cow's milk products, tree nuts, wheat, shellfish, fish and soy) **should be introduced around 6 months of age** along with other solids. There is no evidence that delaying introduction of allergenic foods, beyond when other solids are introduced, helps to prevent food allergies. In fact, introducing peanut-containing foods before baby is 1 reduces the risk of them developing a food allergy to peanuts. **If your child is at high risk for food allergies (has siblings or parents with allergies), consult your child's provider before introducing these foods.**

You can feed your baby these high allergen foods at any time (delay whole cow's milk as a beverage until after age 1 due to nutritional concerns). If you prefer, you can choose to introduce these foods after a few other solids have been tolerated (vegetables, fruits, grains). Avoid whole nuts and spoonfuls of nut butters as they are choking hazards at this age. You can stir nut butters into yogurt, oatmeal or other purees or spread it lightly on toast.

Items of Caution

-  **Honey** may contain botulism spores that can be harmful. Never add honey to baby's food or serve foods containing honey before age 1.
-  **Cow's milk, fortified soy milk and milk alternatives** should not be offered as a beverage before age 1 because they do not meet infants' nutritional needs and can be hard for their digestive systems to process. Small amounts in recipes are okay as long as they do not contain added sugar.
-  **Added sugar** should be avoided before the age of 2. Nutrient requirements for infants and young children are quite high relative to their size, so foods need to be nutrient-dense.
-  **Sodium** should be limited. To minimize sodium content, prepare baby's foods without added salt and limit processed foods. If using frozen or canned items, check the label and opt for versions with no- or low-salt.
-  **Fruit juice** offers no nutritional benefit to children and should not be offered to infants, unless otherwise indicated by your child's primary care provider. Children should instead be encouraged to eat whole fruits which have more nutrients and fiber. Never give juice in a bottle.
-  **Well water** is a potential source of contaminants, particularly well water that has been contaminated by run-off from fertilizers used at farms. If you have well water or live in a large farming community, it's a good idea to have your water analyzed by your county's health department. For contact information, visit: deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources.

Introducing New Foods

Offer new foods one at a time, giving new single foods a trial run of 3-4 days to look for any allergic reactions before introducing other new foods. Once foods have been given individually, you can combine multiple foods at one feeding. If a new food causes a rash, diarrhea, or other problems, discontinue that food until a later time. Try a different food when your baby is back to normal.

You can purchase baby foods that offer your infant new tastes and textures, or you can fork-mash, cut-up or grind whatever foods you may be serving the rest of the family (just leave the salt and sugar out of your baby's portion). You should cook it a little longer, until it is very soft, and cut it into small pieces or mash or puree so that your baby can handle it in order to decrease the risk of choking.

You can also opt to skip the purees and use a baby-led weaning approach which essentially is offering developmentally appropriate table foods from the start. For more information, check out [Born to Eat](#) by Leslie Schilling, RDN and Wendy Jo Peterson, RDN or schedule an appointment with a registered dietitian nutritionist.

Variety

Whether you decide to offer pureed, mashed or chopped foods, offer a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, proteins and whole grains. The more color the better! If your infant rejects a new food, wait a few days and try again. Teaching your child to eat a wide variety of nutritious foods will help establish good eating habits and offer health benefits throughout life.

Texture

As your baby progresses with solids, it's important to expose them to a variety of textures and to offer food that encourages chewing. Chewing movements allow the progression to soft, mashed foods. Offering small pieces of food that can be picked up with their thumb and finger will help with the transition to table foods.

Introducing Whole Grains

Start with single grains such as oatmeal, barley or quinoa. Whether you prepare them yourself or use iron-fortified baby cereal, they can be thinned with breast milk or formula to reach desired consistency.



Never put cereal in a bottle or infant feeder. This does not teach your baby how to chew and swallow and can cause choking. Instead, offer grains from a spoon or prepare in a way that baby can pick up with their fingers.

Introducing Vegetables and Fruits

Plain vegetables and fruits are the most nutritious. Sweet potatoes, green beans, peas, squash, spinach, kale, peaches, apples, avocado or banana are good choices.

Avoid added salt and sugar. When buying commercially prepared baby food, read the ingredient list carefully before purchasing and choose varieties without added salt, sugar or other fillers.

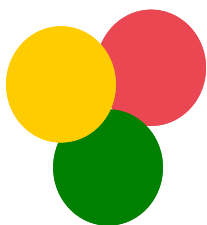
Adding Protein Foods

Meats and other protein-rich foods can be introduced at any age and make great first foods, especially for breastfed babies due to their high iron and zinc content.

Try well-cooked strained, ground or finely chopped beef, pork, lamb, veal, chicken, or turkey; pureed or mashed cooked beans or split peas; as well as tofu, mild cheese, cottage cheese, plain yogurt or eggs.



Cook protein foods without added salt. Remove all bones and skin before straining, blending or chopping. When buying commercially prepared baby food, look for plain meats rather than mixed vegetable and meat dinners; ounce for ounce, plain meats give more protein and iron.



75 Foods to Introduce Before Your Baby Turns 1

Exposing your baby to as many foods and textures as you can will increase acceptance and reduce picky eating. Use this checklist as inspiration for providing your baby with lots of yummy food!

Introduce one new food every 3-4 days. This will allow you to recognize if an adverse reaction occurs. Offer 1-2 teaspoons to start, gradually increasing amount as your baby is ready. Let your baby be the guide as to how much they need.

You can start with simple purees for most of these foods or try incorporating them into pancakes, fritters, patties or muffins. Serve finger foods in age-appropriate sizes to prevent choking.

- Younger babies (6-8 months) generally use their whole hand to pick up food. Therefore, serve food that is bigger than the palm of their hand. Long strips or “fingers” work well, about 2 inches long.
- As babies get older (8-9 months) and their pincer grasp develops, they can pick up smaller pieces of food. At this point, you can serve finely diced or chopped pieces small enough for baby to pick up with their thumb and forefinger.
- For more age-appropriate preparation ideas, check out [solidstarts.com](https://www.solidstarts.com).

Whole Grains

Do not give products that contain honey until after 12 months old

Amaranth	Barley	Brown Rice	Cornmeal	Farro
Millet	Oats	Quinoa	Rye	Wheat

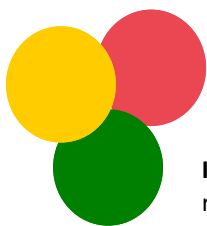
Fruits

Serve fruits cooked (not raw) until 8 months old

Ripe bananas, avocados and berries do not need to be cooked

Whole berries and grapes are choking hazards—mash or cut into halves or quarters before serving

Apples	Apricots	Avocado	Banana	Blackberries
Blueberries	Cantaloupe	Coconut	Figs	Grapes
Kiwi	Mango	Orange	Peaches	Pears
Pineapple	Plum	Raspberries	Strawberries	Watermelon



75 Foods to Introduce Before Your Baby Turns 1 (continued)

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You can start with simple purees for most of these foods or try incorporating them into pancakes, fritters, patties or muffins. Serve finger foods in age-appropriate sizes to prevent choking.

Vegetables

Serve cooked until after 12 months old or when your baby can chew well enough that no choking hazard is present

Asparagus	Beets	Bell Peppers	Broccoli	Brussels Sprouts
Butternut Squash	Carrots	Cauliflower	Celery	Collard Greens
Green Beans	Kale	Mushrooms	Onions	Parsnips
Peas	Potatoes	Pumpkin	Spaghetti Squash	Spinach
Sweet Potatoes	Swiss Chard	Tomatoes	Turnips	Zucchini

Protein and Dairy

Cook all meat until well-done

Serve full-fat, whole milk dairy products (avoid serving milk as a beverage until 1 year)

Nut and seed butters served by the spoon are a choking hazard — stir into yogurt or purees or thinly spread onto banana or toast

Almond Butter	Beans	Beef	Cheese	Chicken
Cod	Cottage Cheese	Edamame	Eggs	Garbanzo Beans
Lentils	Peanut Butter	Plain Greek Yogurt	Pork	Pumpkin Seed Butter
Salmon	Sardines	Shrimp	Sunflower Seed Butter	Tofu

Storing Foods

Pour your baby's food into a bowl so that any food left in the jar or container remains sanitary and can be refrigerated for later use. Discard any unused baby food if you feed your baby straight from the jar or container.

Do not put any leftovers your baby doesn't finish back in the jar or save them to feed later.

Opened jars of baby food that have been refrigerated should be thrown out after 24 hours.



Homemade Baby Food

With a little planning and a blender, fork, strainer, food processor and/or a baby food grinder, you can make foods for your baby at home. Homemade baby food helps cut food costs and will provide baby with food as nutritious, if not more nutritious, than commercially prepared baby foods. Making your own baby food will also help baby get used to foods the family eats.

Cook food until soft without added salt or sugar and then puree, mash or chop. Some foods, like ripe bananas or avocados can be mashed with a fork and don't need to be pre-cooked. It may be necessary to add some fluid (breast milk, formula, water or cooking water) to the food to make it the right consistency. When using canned or frozen foods, always check the ingredient list and make sure you are not adding extra sugar, salt or other unnecessary additives to your baby's diet.

Tips for Making Homemade Baby Food

- ♦ **Work under the most sanitary conditions possible.** Wash utensils, bowls, and working areas with hot, soapy water and rinse well.
- ♦ **Peel and thoroughly wash all fruits and vegetables.**
- ♦ **Cook foods.** When necessary, steam food in a small, covered saucepan with a small amount of water until tender. The amount of water is important: the less water used, the more nutrients stay in the food.
- ♦ **Separate baby's food from the rest of the family's before adding seasoning or spices.** Babies need very little, if any, added salt or sugar.
- ♦ **Puree, mash or chop food** using a blender, food processor, baby food grinder, spoon or fork.
- ♦ **Test for smoothness** by rubbing a small amount of food between your fingers. Add a liquid such as breast milk, formula or water to achieve desired consistency.
- ♦ **Refrigerate or freeze food that won't be eaten immediately.** Freeze food in single-serving sizes to make thawing quick and easy and to prevent waste.

How Much Should My Baby Eat?

Breast milk and infant formula continue to provide important nutrients for growing infants, but babies will start to drink less as they approach their first birthday and are getting more nutrients from the variety of foods they have learned to eat and enjoy.

You may be concerned that you are feeding your child too much or not enough. Pay attention to your baby’s hunger and fullness cues. Watch for signs from your baby to ensure you’re meeting their unique needs.

“No more, please!”

- Sucks without enthusiasm**
- Stops or turns away from the breast or bottle**
- Turns away from or spits out familiar food**
- Refuses to open mouth**
- Becomes fussy**

Let your baby finger feed and practice feeding themselves with a spoon. This is good preparation for the toddler years when your child will take charge of self-feeding. You may just let them play with food or hold a spoon while you do the actual feedings to start, but they’ll quickly get the hang of it.

Establish regular mealtimes and let baby eat alongside the rest of the family whenever possible. Your baby’s meal pattern should gradually begin to resemble that of the rest of the family with 3 meals and 2 snacks by the time they are about a year old. The table below gives an example of what your baby’s daily eating schedule may look like from 6-12 months of age.

	6-8 months old	8-10 Months Old	10-12 Months Old
Breast Milk or Formula	24-32 oz daily	24-32 oz daily	24-30 oz daily (24 oz by 12 months)
Whole Grains	3-4 Tbsp, 1-2 times per day	3-4 Tbsp, 2-3 times per day	3-4 Tbsp, 2-3 times a day
Fruits & Vegetables	1-2 Tbsp each, 1-2 times per day	2-3 Tbsp each, 2 times per day	2-4 Tbsp each, 2 times per day
Meats, Protein & Dairy	1-2 Tbsp each, 1-2 times per day	1-2 Tbsp each, 2 times per day	2-4 Tbsp each, 2 times per day
Juice	None	None	None
Snacks	None	0-1 per day	1-2 per day

Feeding Safety

Never leave your baby unattended while eating and avoid foods that could present a choking hazard. If you are unsure about whether or not a food is safe, ask yourself these following questions:

- ◆ **Does it melt in the mouth?** Such as dry cereals and light, flaky crackers.
- ◆ **Is it cooked enough so that it mashes easily?** Test it by mashing it in between your thumb and forefinger.
- ◆ **Is it naturally soft?** Such as cottage cheese, shredded cheese, plain yogurt or small pieces of tofu.
- ◆ **Can it be gummed?** Small pieces of ripe banana or avocado and well-cooked pasta can be gummed easily.









Finger Foods












As your baby gains independence and fine motor skills, encourage self-feeding by offering finger foods. Sometimes babies enjoy playing with their foods, so be patient.

A baby should participate in their own feeding (they can hold one spoon while you efficiently deliver food with another if needed at the beginning). Over-control of a child's feeding can lead to significant feeding problems later. Thick cereal, mashed potatoes or oatmeal that sticks to a spoon will make it easier for your child to feed themselves. If you have worries about your approach to feeding your child, discuss your concerns with your baby's primary care provider or registered dietitian nutritionist.

Safe Finger Foods

- | | |
|--|---|
|  Soft, peeled fruit slices |  Cooked noodles |
|  Toasted whole grain bread |  Small pieces of mild cheese |
|  Unsweetened dry cereal (Cheerios) |  Cooked pieces of vegetables |

Choking Hazards

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
|  Popcorn |  Raw vegetables |  Candy |
|  Nuts |  Nut butters |  Chips |
|  Gum |  Hot dogs |  Whole grapes |
|  Raisins |  Pretzels | |

Making Meals Work

If you have not already done so, have your baby join the rest of the family at meals so they can enjoy being at the table!

Keep your baby's temperament in mind when you are trying to introduce new foods. If you encounter resistance to new textures, serve them in small portions and mix them with food you know your infant likes. A baby who likes a lot of stimulation may enjoy it when you "play airplane" with the spoon to get the food into their mouth. A more sensitive baby, however, may need the focus kept on eating with minimal distractions.

Weaning from the Breast

Many mothers choose to continue breastfeeding after 12 months. With the many transitions of the second year of life, breastfeeding moms enjoy this special time with their baby. Babies thrive on breast milk and solid foods during their second year.



If you choose to wean your baby from the breast at this time, feel free to call the Health Care Center at 919-531-8809 to speak with a lactation consultant or lactation educator for assistance in learning steps for safe weaning.

Weaning from the Bottle

Your baby should be **completely weaned from the bottle by 12-15 months**. To help make weaning at 12 months easier, try to:

- ♦ **Offer WHOLE milk from a cup at about 12 months of age.** Reduced-fat milk should not be offered until after age 2, unless otherwise recommended by your child's provider.
- ♦ **Avoid bottles at meal time.** Offer milk or water in a cup instead.
- ♦ **Offer a snack of whole milk and fruit before a nap** rather than a bottle or breastfeeding.
- ♦ **Give your baby a cup when they are happy,** not when they are cranky.
- ♦ **Put formula or breastmilk in a cup and only water in the bottle.**
- ♦ **Wean your baby from their favorite feedings last.** These are usually the early morning and nighttime bottle or breastfeeding.
- ♦ **Sing or read to help comfort your baby.** A special toy may also be used to help soothe them.

Reminder About Vitamin D

A supplement of **400 IU** of vitamin D3 is needed every day unless your baby consumes at least 32 ounces of vitamin D-fortified formula daily. Children 1 year and older should receive a supplement of **600 IU** of vitamin D3 daily unless they are consuming it through food.

Sources

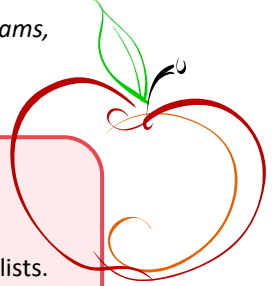
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Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025.

Wholesome Baby Food, wholesomebabyfood.momtastic.com.

Feeding Infants – A Guide for Use in the Child Nutrition Programs,
USDA, Food and Nutrition Services.



Helpful Infant Feeding Apps

Made for Mums

Access week-by-week guides, meal planners and shopping lists.

Ella's First Foods

Full of recipes by age, meal planners, shopping lists and more.

Resources for Parents

Starting Solids: The Essential Guide to Your Baby's First Foods

[Annabel Karmel](#)

Features more than 50 recipes, menu planners and simple, practical tips to help parents encourage their babies to explore new tastes.

The Smart Mom's Guide to Starting Solids

[Jill Castle, MS, RD](#)

Whether you spoon feed your baby or use a baby-led weaning approach, this step-by-step blueprint for starting baby food, advancing flavors and textures, supporting self-feeding and getting your baby to the family table covers it all.

101 Healthiest Foods for Kids

[Sally Kuzemchak, MS, RD](#)

This interactive guide will tell you everything you need to know about discovering which foods are best for fueling kids' minds and bodies along with tips to help any eater eat healthier.

Born to Eat

[Leslie Schilling, MA, RDN and Wendy Jo Peterson, MS, RDN](#)

We are all born to eat. When babies show signs of readiness for solid foods, they can eat almost everything the family eats and become healthy, happy eaters in the process. This book provides a family-based feeding philosophy that encompasses a baby-led weaning approach.