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## Feeding Your Baby Solid Foods

At about 6 months of age, your baby is ready to start eating solid foods. Human milk/breastmilk or infant formula is the only food your baby needs for the first 6 months. Breastfed babies also need a daily vitamin D supplement of 10 µg (400 IU).

Solid foods give your baby extra energy, iron and other nutrients needed for healthy growth and development. Introducing solid foods also helps your baby learn how to eat and enjoy new flavours and textures.

This fact sheet provides tips on how to introduce new foods to your baby, along with answers to common feeding questions. If you have specific questions about what and when to feed your baby, talk to your baby's health care provider or a Registered Dietitian.



### Steps you can take

#### Starting Solid (Complementary) Foods

##### When should I offer solid foods?

At about 6 months of age, your baby is ready for solid foods. Start slowly and follow your baby's lead. Offer food when your baby appears curious about food. Your baby is ready when they:

- Make smacking or puckering noises or move their hands to their mouth.
- Have good head and neck control (can hold their head up on their own).
- Can sit up alone and lean forward.
- Can pick up items such as a toy and try to put it in their mouth.
- Can turn their head, such as to watch you eat.

A good starting point is to offer solid foods about 2 times a day, for example, at breakfast and lunch. Then go to about 3 to 4 times a day. When your baby is about 9 months of age, you can offer solids 4 to 5 times a day.

You can offer food before or after offering breastmilk or infant formula. Do what

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works for you and your baby.

### **What types of food should I offer and in what order?**

- Start with iron-rich foods. Iron supports your baby's growth and development. Examples are:
  - cooked meat like beef, pork, lamb and game, poultry and fish
  - cooked eggs
  - legumes (beans, peas and lentil), tofu and peanut-containing products
  - iron-fortified infant cereals like buckwheat, rice or wheat.
- Once your baby is eating iron-rich foods at least 2 times a day, offer a variety of other types of food including vegetables, fruit, grains and milk products including yogurt and cheese. The order does not matter.
- Wait until 9 months before giving your baby pasteurized homogenized whole milk (3.25% M.F.) to drink. Milk can be added to cereal or used in recipes starting at 6 months of age.
- Offer foods that the family eats. Try to cook food without added salt and sugar. Use herbs and spices to flavour food or use low-sodium or sodium-reduced versions when available such as low-sodium soy sauce.

### **What types of textures should I offer?**

- Offer a variety of textures starting right at 6 months of age. There are no specific progression guidelines so offer a variety of textures such as:
  - minced
  - mashed
  - shredded
  - chopped/cut up or in small pieces that your baby can pick up (finger foods)
  - pureed (blended)
  - lumpy.
- Food texture examples include:
  - Vegetables:

- Pureed, mashed or lumpy cooked vegetables such as sweet potato or squash
- Soft-cooked (from fresh or frozen) pieces of vegetables such as broccoli, carrots or green/yellow beans
- Mashed or pieces of canned (no salt added) vegetables
- Peeled and grated raw vegetables like carrots
- Fruits:
  - Pureed, mashed or lumpy soft fruit
  - Slices, diced or pieces of soft fresh, frozen and thawed or canned fruit (rinsed) like pears, peaches or mandarins. Remove any peels, seeds or pits.
  - Peeled and grated raw fruit like apples
- Whole grain products
  - Pieces or strips of toasted whole wheat bread, English muffin, iota bread or naan
  - Unsweetened O-shaped oat cereal
  - Cooked pasta or noodles, quinoa
- Protein foods:
  - Mashed, minced, chopped or pieces of well cooked egg (hard boiled or scrambled), tofu, no added salt canned lentils and beans such as black, kidney and navy beans, thinly sliced peanut butter
  - Cooked meat, fish or poultry that has been ground or minced or chopped into small pieces
    - Add breastmilk, formula or pureed vegetables if food is too dry
  - Cheese (20% M.F. or higher), cottage cheese and plain yogurt (2% M.F. or higher)
- Your baby can begin to feed themselves minced or small pieces of food using their fingers as early as 6 months. Encouraging your baby to finger feed helps them to develop important feeding skills.

- If your baby is fed mashed or lumpy foods by spoon, you can provide your baby with their own spoon.
- Special packaged baby foods like food puffs or rice rusks are not needed. They do not help to teach your baby about eating different textures and have little nutrition. It is best to provide cut up regular food to teach your baby how to self-feed.
- By 12 months your baby will be able to eat a variety of foods from family meals, modified in size and texture to prevent choking.

### **How much should I feed my baby?**

- Prepare small amounts of each food and see how much your baby takes. Offer more if your baby wants more. There is no “right” amount for your baby to eat.
- The amount of food a baby eats will vary from one day to the next and from one baby to the other. If your baby does not want to eat, try again at the next meal. Do not force them to eat or play games or tricks to make them eat. Try not to compare your baby to another.
- Work towards offering 3 foods per meal and at least 2 foods for a snack. At 12 months you can start a regular schedule of meals and snacks.

### **How will I know if my baby is getting enough food?**

- Your baby will let you know if they are hungry or have had enough to eat. Slowing down and losing interest, a shut mouth, a head turning away from food, or pushing food away means “I’ve had enough.”
- These signs might also mean that your baby is ready for other textures. If your baby is only offered spoon-fed foods, try offering pieces of foods at the beginning of the meal so that your baby can feed themselves.
- Be mindful that teething, growth spurts and tiredness can affect how much your baby will eat. This is normal. Allow your baby to decide how much to eat. If your baby is growing well, they are getting enough to eat. If you are worried, talk to your baby’s health care provider or dietitian.

### **What foods should I avoid offering?**

- Avoid foods your baby can choke on. Examples include:
  - raw vegetables
  - nuts and seeds

- hotdogs/wieners
  - hard candy or cough drops
  - raisins and other dried fruit
  - whole grapes
  - fish with bones
  - popcorn
  - sticky food like marshmallows or gum
  - peanuts and nut butters spread thickly.
- Some of the above foods may be offered if they are cut or chopped into smaller pieces (such as grapes quartered), thinned or diluted peanut butter (thinly spread or mixed in cereal or yogurt), pits are removed from fruit, hard fruit and vegetables are grated or cooked to a soft texture (such as carrots and apples) and fibrous or stringy textures are finely chopped (such as celery and pineapple).
  - Do not give your baby:
    - Honey (including pasteurized honey and honey used in cooking or added to food such as yogurt or cereal) until after 12 months. It can cause a serious type of food poisoning called botulism.
    - Unpasteurized or raw milk and milk-based foods.
    - Fish high in mercury such as fresh or frozen tuna, shark, swordfish, marlin, orange roughy, and escolar.

### **When can I give my baby cow's milk?**

- Between 9 to 12 months of age babies can be given 3.25% homogenized whole pasteurized cow's milk to drink, once they are eating a variety of foods including iron-rich foods, fruits and vegetables every day.
- Milk should be offered in an open cup (not a sippy or training cup) that helps your baby to develop drinking skills.
- If cow's milk is your baby's main milk source, offer 500 mL (2 cups or 16 oz) daily. Do not offer more than 750 mL (3 cups or 24 oz) since too much milk can fill your baby up and increase their chance of having low iron. To help meet their fluid needs, also offer water.

- Soy, rice, almond and coconut beverages are currently not recommended for babies in the first two years of life as alternatives to breastmilk, infant formula or whole cow's milk. These beverages may not have enough protein, vitamins and minerals.
  - Full fat, fortified, unsweetened soy beverage may be offered occasionally but it is not suitable as a main milk source for children younger than two years of age. Talk to your health care provider or dietitian if you have questions.

**Should I avoid giving my baby certain foods to prevent allergic reactions?**  
Some foods are more likely than others to cause allergic reactions.

Common allergen foods include:

- peanuts or peanut butter
- eggs
- fish
- milk products like yogurt and cheese
- nuts like almonds or cashew
- sesame
- shellfish such as lobster or shrimp
- soy, such as tofu or edamame beans
- wheat (including iron-fortified infant cereals).

Common food allergens can be introduced when your baby starts solid foods.

- Introduce one new common food allergen a day. This makes it easier to know which food is the problem if your baby has an allergic reaction.
- Watch for signs of an allergic reaction such as a rash, hives, runny nose, itchy watery eyes, swelling of the lips or face, vomiting, diarrhea or breathing problems.
- If there is no reaction, continue to provide the food at least weekly to maintain tolerance. Peanut-containing products and cooked egg or egg-containing products should be introduced around 6 months of age, and no later than 1 year of age.

Your child might be at higher risk of developing a food allergy if they or an

immediate family member have had eczema, food allergy, allergic rhinitis (hay fever) or asthma. For high risk babies, allergenic foods including a small amount of cooked (not raw) egg two times weekly and diluted peanut butter weekly (mixed in cereal or yogurt) can be introduced at about 6 months and not before 4 months of age, in a safe and way, at home.

Talk to your health care provider or dietitian for more information, and if your baby had a reaction to a food.

### **What does a typical meal look like that I could offer my baby?**

Here are a few simple sample meal plans for babies 6-9 months old and 9-12 months old to give you ideas about how to feed your baby. These are general guidelines only, as every baby is different. The amount that your baby eats can change from day to day. Trust your baby to let you know when they are hungry or full.

### **Sample Meals for Your Baby**

In addition to offering human milk/breastmilk or infant formula to your baby, try offering:

<i>Meal Times</i>	<i>For 6-9 month olds</i>	<i>For 9-12 month olds</i>
<b>Breakfast</b>	Pureed fruit or mashed, chopped/cut up soft fruit like strawberries or kiwi	Full-fat plain yogurt or cottage cheese or cooked and chopped hard-boiled egg Chopped/cut up fruit like cantaloupe, kiwi, papaya plum or seedless grapes
<b>Snack</b>	Small pieces or strips of whole grain toast, plain or thinly spread with peanut or other nut butter	Small pieces or strips of whole-grain toast, roti or unsweetened O-shaped oat cereal Applesauce or frozen, thawed blueberries or grated apple
<b>Lunch</b>	Cooked, ground or mashed scrambled or hard-boiled egg, tofu or legumes like beans, peas or lentils Cooked, mashed vegetables like sweet potato or squash or	Cooked, chopped or cut up meat, poultry or fish* Cooked whole wheat pasta, rice or chopped pieces of Matzo ball Cooked, chopped or pieces of vegetable like broccoli, zucchini

<i>Meal Times</i>	<i>For 6-9 month olds</i>	<i>For 9-12 month olds</i>
	cooked and chopped vegetables like carrots or green beans	or peas
<b>Snack</b>	Unsweetened pureed stewed prunes Or: Pieces/ slices of soft avocado or mango	Shredded or small cubes of cheese like full-fat mozzarella, Swiss or cheddar with pieces of unsalted whole grain cracker or toast Or: Pieces of whole grain muffin Grated carrot
<b>Dinner</b>	Cooked, mashed or chopped vegetables like broccoli, zucchini or green peas Cooked, ground or minced meat, poultry or fish* Mashed canned, drained, peaches or pears or slices of soft fruit like banana	Pieces of cooked or canned fish* or firm tofu or chopped poultry or meat Cooked and chopped vegetables like cauliflower or beets Cooked rice or quinoa Canned, drained, chopped fruit like mandarins or cut up fresh fruit

\*Children under the age of one should eat less than 40 grams (1.5 oz) of frozen or fresh tuna, shark, swordfish, marlin, orange roughy and escolar per month and less than 40 grams of canned white (albacore) tuna per week. These fish are high in mercury.

## Common Questions and Answers

### What if my baby refuses solids at first?

This is common. This is a new for your baby so be patient as they learn. It may take up to 10 exposures before your baby likes a new food or texture. Don't be discouraged. Do not force or trick your baby to eat. Pressuring your baby to eat does not work.

Try these ideas when your baby is refusing foods:



- Offering solids 2 or more times during the day and offer different types of food.
- Offer the refused food again in a few days.
- Serve food at different temperatures.
- Mix solid food with breastmilk or infant formula to make it more familiar to your baby.
- Let your child feed themselves, using their fingers or fists.
- If you feel like your baby is not interested in eating solid food and you offer breastmilk or infant formula first, try offering solids first to see if there is more interest in eating.
- Avoid offering juice as this may fill them up and lower their interest in eating solid food and may lead to tooth decay.
- Offer solid foods when you think your baby is alert and most hungry.
- Feed your baby when you or other family members are eating and adjust the texture to meet your baby's feeding ability. Packaged baby foods are an option, but some products may limit the texture your baby will have.

### **What should I do if my baby gags on food?**

Gagging or coughing is a normal reflex when babies are learning how to chew and swallow new textures. It is different than choking where food is stuck and your baby is quiet. Gagging occurs when food comes too close to the back of the throat without swallowing. Babies often gag to prevent choking on a food.

Try the following tips to keep your baby from gagging:

- Have your baby sit up straight (not slouched or in the incline position) and buckled securely into the high chair.
- Offer foods at the table with no distractions so that you and your baby can focus on eating.
- Be careful with the size, shape and texture of finger foods. Offer textures your baby can handle well.
  - If your baby is gagging on foods mashed with big lumps, try smaller lumps.
  - Consider offering smaller amounts on a smaller spoon if spoon feeding.

- Serve stringy foods like celery or pineapple finely chopped.
- Serve fish or poultry with all bones removed.
- Offer nut butters thinly spread on toast or crackers.
- Never leave your baby alone while eating. If your baby gags often, seems to have trouble swallowing, or chokes on food, talk to your health care provider.

### **How can I help my baby learn to eat solids and enjoy mealtimes?**

- Include your baby at family meals. Talk, smile and look at your baby. Your baby learns by watching you.
- Allow your baby to eat at their own pace. They may be ready to get down from their chair after 5 or 10 minutes. Do not keep your baby in the chair for too long (30 minutes or longer) unless they are still interested in eating.
- Offer foods with different colours and textures that your baby can chew and swallow easily and safely.
- Allow your baby to explore foods and make a mess! Mashing, smelling, smearing are all part of learning to like foods.
- Avoid distractions for you and your baby such as TV, toys, telephone calls, radio and pets. This will help you and your baby focus on eating.
- Let your baby use their fists and fingers to eat. Your baby will still use their fingers as utensils for a few years.

### **Should I give my baby water or juice?**

- Your baby gets enough to drink from breastmilk or infant formula. After 6 months you can give your baby small amounts of tap, bottled or well water that meets safety standards in a regular cup. Giving your baby a regular cup helps them learn important drinking skills.
- Offering juice to your baby is not recommended. If you do choose to offer juice, do not give more than 125-175 ml ( $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup) per day of 100% fruit juice. Offer it in a regular cup as part of a meal or snack and not between meals and snacks. Juice can affect their appetite and lead to tooth decay. Fruit and vegetables provide more nutrition than juice.
- Do not give your baby mineral or carbonated water, fruit drinks, fruit punch, soft drinks or sports drinks. Similar to fruit juice, many of these drinks are high in sugar and lack vitamins and minerals.

### **How many bowel movements should my baby have each day?**

Starting solids can change the colour and texture of your baby's stools. It can also change how often your baby has bowel movements. Some days your baby may not have a bowel movement. On other days your baby may have up to four bowel movements.

If stools are soft and easy to pass, your baby is not constipated. If you have concerns, talk with your baby's health care provider.

### **My baby is not eating much solid food at 10 months. Should I be concerned?**

Your baby may eat a different amount of food than other babies. Your baby is learning about food and may need a number of times of trying a new food to become more familiar with it. A 'yuck' face may just be a reaction to something different and may not mean the food is disliked. Try not to compare your baby to other babies.

Talk to your health care provider or dietitian if your baby:

- Is not eating solid foods, is not taking any iron-rich foods or eats only a few solid foods by 7 months.
- Eats only pureed textures by 9 months.