

BETHESDA PEDIATRICS

Introduction of Solid Foods

When to start solids?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends introducing solids foods at 6 months of age, however some babies may be ready as early as 4 months of age. Signs of readiness include: showing interest in your food (e.g. staring, smacking lips, or grabbing). Additionally, your infant should exhibit good head and neck control by sitting well in a high chair. Lastly, she should swallow introduced foods rather than push it out with her tongue.

How do we start solids?

The first solid food that was traditionally introduced was single-grain cereal. While this is still acceptable, you could also start with a pureed vegetable or fruit. Some parents prefer to start with non-sweet foods before sweet foods.

First feed your infant one pureed (or “Stage 1”) food with a spoon daily for 3-4 days, watching for potential reactions such as vomiting, diarrhea, rash, hives, swelling of eyes/lips, or difficulty breathing. Then you may expand your infant’s dietary repertoire, leaving at least 3-4 days between starting new foods. *Do not feed your infant more than 1 new food at a time until you know your infant has tolerated each food individually.* Pureed meats can also be started at this time. Also, you may offer your baby sips of water once you begin solid foods.

Once your infant has mastered many different types of pureed foods by 8 months of age, you can introduce more textured foods (Stages 2-3). By this time, your infant’s diet should contain a variety of foods, including vegetables, fruits, meats, cereals, well-cooked eggs and fish. Even with solids, the bulk of your infant’s nutrition will still derive from either breast milk/formula until his 1st birthday.

How often should my baby be eating solids once started?

Within 1-2 months, increase the amount from 1-2 teaspoons per meal up to 4+ oz (approx 1 baby jar), and frequency from 1x/day up to 3x/day with meals.

What about allergenic foods?

One large, reputable study (LEAP study) showed that it is actually beneficial to introduce peanut within the first year of life to reduce risk of allergy. Do not offer whole peanut (choking risk) but rather “Bambas” (peanut-containing puffed corn snack) or a *thin smear* of natural, plain peanut butter on puffed snack or mixed into pureed food. The same principle of early introduction and continued re-exposure to build and maintain tolerance applies to eggs and fish, too. **However** – Talk to your doctor if your child has moderate-severe eczema, or if a parent or sibling of your baby has a nut/fish/shellfish allergy, *before* introducing these foods. Your doctor may recommend evaluation by allergist beforehand or observation of infant after trying such foods at allergist’s office (“baby peanut challenge”).

Why are my baby’s bowel movements different?

Solid foods will often change your infant’s stools to become more odorous, to vary in color, or they may become harder or less frequent. Constipating foods include rice cereal and banana. Foods that typically cause softer stools include prunes, pears, oats or foods with fiber or higher water content. Acidic foods (e.g. tomatoes or citrus) may cause redness/irritation around the mouth or anus; try applying Aquaphor as a barrier beforehand.

Special considerations and other pearls

- Your infant should be eating the same food as family members at family meals by 12 months of age
- Do not feed your baby cow’s milk until he turns 12 months of age (but other dairy, such as cheese and yogurt are okay to offer before 12 months)
- Do not feed your baby anything containing raw honey or honey that has not been cooked at high temperature until she turns 12 months of age, as infants are at increased risk of botulism
- If your infant has a milk protein allergy, talk to your doc about how to introduce cow’s milk at 12 months of age (e.g. consider soy milk first)
- No juice for infants! (Except for small amounts of prune/pear juice as needed for constipation)
- Let your baby get messy! Playing with foods and different textures helps your baby’s development
- Begin introducing cups at 6-9 months, with the goal to wean off the bottle by 12-18 months of age
- *When your baby is ready to advance to finger food or table food, cut or mash food into small bites that your baby does not need to chew to avoid choking hazard. The most common types of foods on which babies choke are hot dogs, popcorn, grapes, whole seeds/nuts, chunks of meat/cheese/peanut butter, and candy.*
- Visit www.healthychildren.org for further information.