

Fact Sheet

Baby's First Foods



The introduction of soft, solid food is an important stage in your baby's development. It is an exciting and challenging time for you and your baby. Go at your baby's pace as all children are different and progress at a different pace.

The following information can be used as a guide for the introduction of solids into your baby's diet.

When to start

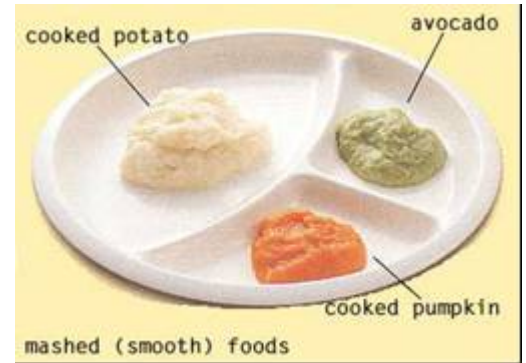
Until **6 months of age**, your baby needs only human milk or infant formula to grow and develop. However, around 6 months your child's nutrient stores and requirements are no longer met by breast milk/ formula alone in particular for iron and zinc. Introducing solids can help to ensure your baby receives all the vitamins and minerals needed to grow and develop into a healthy child.

Around 6 months your baby may show signs that he/she is ready for starting solids. These may include:

- Wanting to put things in his/her mouth
- Able to suck small amounts of pureed food from a spoon
- Interested in food eaten by others
- More frequent feeding
- Can sit upright when supported with good control of the head and neck.

Solids can be introduced gradually. There is no need to force food - human milk or formula is still the most important part of the baby's diet. At this stage solid foods are "tastes" for your baby.

The first spoonful (Around 6 months)



- Offer food **between or after** a milk feed. Start by using a firm plastic spoon with small shallow bowl.
- The first solids need to be sloppy, smooth in texture (i.e. no lumps) and mild in taste.
- Baby rice cereal is an excellent first solid food because of its smooth texture and high iron content. Mix it with a little human milk, formula or cool, boiled water.
- Other pureed foods to introduce are: vegetables such as pumpkin, potato, carrot and zucchini; fruit such as cooked apple, pear, melon and banana.
- Start with one to two teaspoons of solids. Increase the quantity to two to three tablespoons, and then build up to three meals a day at your baby's own pace.
- Try one new food at a time and introduce a new food every 2-4 days adding onto their existing diet.

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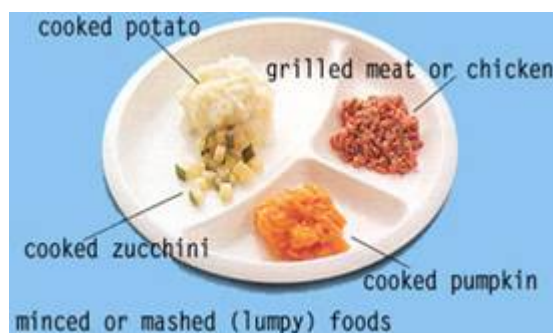
Notes:

- Always wash your hands before preparing food and use clean utensils
- A sip cup can be introduced from 6 months
- When appropriate try adapting family meals to be suitable for your child rather than preparing separate meals i.e. puree meats and vegetables used for the family meal.
- Small quantities of food can be frozen in ice cube trays or stored in airtight plastic bags and thawed as needed.
- Commercial baby foods are a suitable alternative if you do not have enough time to prepare meals however try not to over-rely on these as it is important a child tries a variety of different foods to develop taste preferences.

It is not necessary to add salt, sugar, honey or other flavourings to any food.

Do not add solids to a bottle. Babies need to learn that there is a difference between eating and drinking.

Step 2 (Around 7-8 months)



Once your baby is around eight months old and is eating baby-rice cereal and several different fruits and vegetables, try other foods with a higher protein and iron content with a thicker texture such as:

- Well cooked meats and poultry e.g. meat, chicken, fish
- Cooked egg
- Dried peas, lentils, beans eg baked beans, red kidney beans
- Wheat-based cereals (couscous, pasta, bread/toast) rolled oats, baby muesli, rice.
- Include at least 2-3 different food choices at each meal. Try to offer these separately, not always mixed together to allow you child to develop food preferences for different tastes.

NOTE: If your family has a strong history of allergies discuss this with your doctor.

Food Texture Changes

Between six to nine months of age babies begin to chew (even if they have no teeth). During this time it is important that the texture of foods changes from a smooth puree to a mashed texture with small, soft lumps and finally minced/finely chopped foods. Introducing minced and chopped foods encourages practice in chewing and biting lumpy foods, which helps develop baby's speech.

Hint:

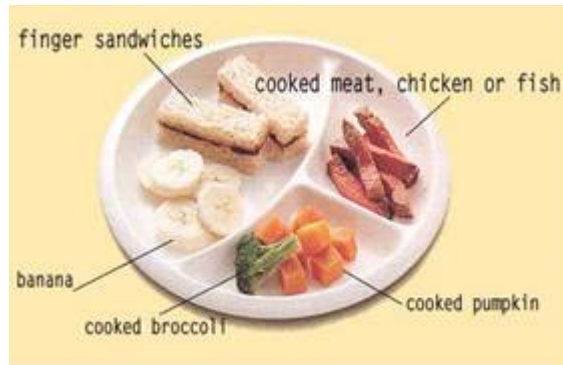
Preparing meals in bulk e.g. casseroles and freezing them in small containers can save time and stress when food is needed in a hurry!

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Step 3 (Around 9-10 months)



- By nine months of age the amount of human milk/formula will gradually decrease as more solids should be eaten at each mealtime
- Start to offer solids **before** milk feeds as they are a more major source of nutrition.
- Continue to increase the variety of foods offered.
- Offer water as a drink as this is better than fruit juice. Any juice should be diluted 50:50 with water and only given in small amounts.
- Encourage your baby to try drinking from a cup rather than a bottle (try a spouted cup).

When your baby starts to pick things up with their hands (around 9 months) try introducing "finger foods" such as:

- small pieces of cheese
- thin strips of chicken, meat or ham
- bread and dry toast rusks
- cooked pasta

- pieces of well cooked fruits and vegetables such as apple, pear, potato, carrot, pumpkin
- pieces of soft raw fruit such as peach, and banana.

To prevent choking ALWAYS watch your baby while he/she is eating. Offer your infant their meals sitting upright.

What about cow's milk?

Human milk or formula should be the major source of milk until one year of age when cow's milk can be used instead (human milk can be continued over one year of age). However, from 8-9 months cow's milk **can** be used in the preparation of foods such as custard and on cereal. Other milk products such as custard, yoghurt and cheeses can also be used from this time.

Your baby will now become more social and join in the family meal. Although it can be messy, it's an important part of the learning process and should be encouraged.

Foods to Avoid include:

- Raw or undercooked pieces of fruit or vegetables (such as apple and carrot) as they can cause choking in babies
- Other small hard foods such as popcorn and lollies.
- Whole nuts (until the age of 5 years)

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By twelve months

- Encourage independent eating and offer drinks from a cup
- A child size portion of your family meal is now suitable
- About half of the baby's nutrition comes from food and half from breastmilk/formula
- Approximately 500-600mls of infant formula (via a sip cup) or 3 to 4 breastfeeds per day is adequate
- Keep offering a wide variety of foods

Your baby will benefit from healthy eating at every stage of development - from childhood, when good nourishment is needed for rapid growth - to adulthood, when a well balanced diet can reduce the risk of many diet-related diseases. Now is the time to introduce life-long healthy eating habits.

A word on fussy eating

It is normal for children to refuse new (unfamiliar) foods. Foods may need to be offered up to 10 times before they become familiar and are accepted. Be persistent!

Offer a new food with foods you know your child likes so even if they don't like the new food there will be other choices for the meal. For more

information refer to our factsheet 'Tucker without tantrums'.

Essential ingredients for parents at this time!

- patience
- a relaxed atmosphere
- protective clothing for floor and parent
- a bib for your baby
- face washer
- a sense of humour!

Remember

- Introduce solids slowly. All babies are different and progress at a different pace.
- Start with single foods, introducing a new food every 2-4 days.
- Encourage a wide variety of foods.
- Be cautious about choking. Always watch your baby when he/she is eating.
- Honey should not be introduced before 12 months (due to risk of infant botulism (bacterial contamination)).
- Low fat dairy products are not suitable for infants under 2 years of age.

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This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for your child.

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