

FEED ME!

A BASIC GUIDE FOR BEGINNING SOLID FOODS

WHEN TO START

The basics are meant to be just that- simple and basic. There is no such thing as a “menu” or “schedule”. During the early months, breast milk or formula alone provides all the calories and nutrients most babies need. As your babies weight and size increases, formula/breast milk are no longer able to provide for their expanding nutritional needs.

The time to begin solid foods is not a certain weight or age, but more a feeling you and your baby have about “how satisfying the breast/bottle is. This may take the form of...



- **Poor sleeping**
- Decreasing intervals between feeds
- General “gut feeling” that your baby needs more

REASONS FOR DELAYING SOLID FOODS

1. Very young infants do not have the neurologic development to properly coordinate swallowing solids without having potentially dangerous choking spells.
2. Feeding infants solid foods if they aren't ready is only introducing excessive calories which can lead to obesity. There are several theories about very early overfeeding contributing to obesity.
3. The old thinking that introducing solid foods will improve the sleeping patterns of a young infant or make them more content may be one of the major reasons for our overweight, food oriented generation. Food should be a last resort for improving the behavior of a fussy infant.

AGE FOR STARTING SOLID FOODS

The best time to begin using a spoon to feed your child is when your baby can sit with some support and move his head to participate in the feeding process. This time is usually between 4 and 6 months of age. Breast milk and commercial formulas meet all of your baby's nutritional needs until 4 to 6 months of age. Introducing strained foods earlier just makes feeding more complicated. Research has shown that in most cases solid foods won't help your baby sleep through the night. The only exceptions are those few breast fed babies who are not getting enough calories or gaining enough weight.

TYPES OF SOLID FOODS

Cereals

Cereals are usually the first solid food added to your baby's diet. Generally these are introduced to infants at 4 months of age.

Cereals should be fed with a small spoon and never given with formula in the baby's bottle. This is because an infant should be taught to differentiate between what he eats and what he drinks.

Start with rice cereal or oatmeal. A mixed cereal should be added to your baby's diet only after each kind of cereal has been separately introduced. Use approximately two ounces of breast milk or formula, and mix in cereal until desired consistency is reached. The cereal should be "soupy" initially, and as the infant adjusts to eating solids you can thicken it accordingly. Remember there will be times when your baby will not be interested in feeding...this is normal. You should try to feed your baby when he is hungry, but not starving. THE SOLID FOOD TAKES PLACE OF NURSING OR BOTTLE FEEDING, so expect your baby to nurse or drink less as they eat more of the solids. Feed the cereal twice a day for 1-2 weeks before starting the fruits or vegetables.

Vegetables and fruit

Strained or pureed vegetables and fruits are the next solid foods introduced to your baby. The order in which you add vegetables and fruits to your baby's diet is not important. However, you should introduce only one new food at a time and no more than two new foods per week. Start with stage I foods, and as your baby adjusts to most of the flavors, you can move on to stage II. The only difference is that in the stage II they combine flavors (mixed veggies, apples & bananas, etc.) If you want to make your own strained fruits and veggies this is okay too.

By 6 to 8 months of age your baby should be ready for strained or pureed meat and protein alternatives (such as beans, peas, lentils, soups, certain cheeses and yogurt.) Vanilla yogurt is a great place to start! At this time, your baby may also want to eat 3 times a day (breakfast, lunch and dinner). Remember - EACH MEAL SHOULD TAKE THE PLACE OF A BOTTLE OR NURSING.

SPOON FEEDING

Begin feeding your baby with a spoon at 4 to 6 months of age. Place food on the middle of the tongue. If you place it in the front, your child will probably push it back at you. Some infants get off to a better start if you place the spoon between their lips and let them suck off the food.

Some children constantly bat at the spoon or try to hold it while you are trying to feed them. These children need to be distracted with finger foods or given another spoon to hold.

By the time they are 1 year old, most children want to try to feed themselves and can do so with finger foods. By 15 to 18 months of age, most children can feed themselves with a spoon and no longer need a parent's help.

FINGER FOODS

Finger foods are small, bite-sized pieces of solid foods. They can be introduced between 7 to 10 months of age or whenever your child develops a pincer grip.

Most babies love to feed themselves. Since most babies will not be able to feed themselves with a spoon until 15 months of age, finger foods keep them actively involved in the feeding process. Good foods to start with are soft pieces of banana, soft hunks of bread, teething cookies, large types of pasta noodles, soft pieces of potato, etc. Remember that before your child develops his pincer grip he usually uses his whole hand or fist to eat, so soft food must be big enough for your baby to hold on to.

Good finger foods are dry cereals (cheerios, rice krispies,) slices of cheese, slices of canned fruit (peaches, pears, or pineapple) slices of fresh fruits (especially bananas,) crackers, cookies, and breads.

SNACKS

Once your baby goes to three meals a day, or eats at 5 hour intervals, he may need small snacks to tide him over between meals. Most babies begin this pattern between 6 to 9 months of age. The midmorning and midafternoon snacks should be nutritious, non-milk food. Fruits and dry cereals are recommended. If your child is not hungry at mealtime, cut back on snacks or eliminate them.

TABLE FOODS

Your child should be eating the same meals you eat by approximately 1 year of age. This assumes that your child is well balanced and that you carefully dice any food that would be difficult for your baby to chew. Avoid foods that he could choke on such as raw carrots, candy, peanuts or other nuts and popcorn.

IRON-RICH FOODS

Throughout our lives we need iron in our diets to prevent anemia. Certain foods are especially good sources of iron. Red meats, fish and poultry are best. Adequate iron is also found in iron-enriched cereals, beans of all types, egg yolks, peanut butter, prune juice, sweet potatoes and spinach.

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