

Starting Baby Food

The second half of the first year of life is exciting and fun. Your infant continues to rapidly grow and develop skills that make your baby a “real person”. One of the more exciting changes involves your baby’s diet, which changes from entirely breast milk or formula to a well balanced diet of table foods. Although many parents are anxious about how to introduce baby foods, the process can and should be fun for both you and your baby. The following guidelines are intended to provide the concepts, details, and helpful hints you will need to help this process along.

When? We recommend starting solids for most babies at 6 months. Some babies will need and be ready to start solids sooner.

How fast? Introduce one new food at time, adding a new food every 3-4 days.

When? Start to “teach” the skill of swallowing baby food from a spoon when your baby has an appetite but isn’t starving, about 30 minutes before the baby usually feeds or after a small part of bottle or breast feeding. Avoid times when your baby is exhausted or cranky. Mid-morning and mid-afternoon might be good times. Once your baby masters this new skill, baby food can be offered at the time of the bottle or breast feeding.

How? Use name brand baby foods or steam and puree your own foods. Use a serving spoon to place a small amount on your baby’s plate and use a baby spoon to feed your baby. You can refrigerate any food remaining in the jar for up to two days. Six month olds can usually sit comfortably in a high chair. Younger children should be inclined in an infant seat.

What? Start with cereal, single grains (rice or oatmeal), then move to yellow vegetables, fruits and green vegetables.

How Much? Start with a small amount, in order to teach your baby to eat from a spoon (one to two tablespoons of cereal mixed with formula or breast milk). As soon as your baby learns how to spoon feed well, add more food until your baby is satisfied or loses patience. They will usually turn away from the food or refuse to open their mouths. Never encourage your baby to “finish”. The baby may finish a meal with a bottle or breast until eventually meals replace the bottle or breast feeding entirely. Start with one meal daily and add a second and third whenever you and your baby are ready.

What Next? At about **7 months**, offer yogurt and fine cottage cheese, plain or with fruits and vegetables. If you are only offering two meals a day, this may be the right time to offer a third meal. At about **8 months**, introduce meat, past and bread products (pancakes, French toast, waffles, grilled cheese etc.) everything should be the size of a cheerio. Once your baby learns how to chew and swallow a small piece, offer cereal, fruits, vegetables and dairy products in pieces. This is when we suggest offering more table food and less baby food. We recommend cooked meats rather than jarred food and suggest moving from the baby food right to soft pieces instead of using stages 2 or 3 foods. At about

10 months we start offering eggs (first the yolk, then can add the whites). At **12 months**, whole milk, fish and other foods can be added. Honey and syrup should **NEVER** be given before your child is 1 year old. Peanut products should be introduced, typically after age 2. If there is a strong family history of severe food allergy, that food should be avoided until the patient is 3 years. Remember that all children should remain on whole milk until age 2. At this time you can change to 1% or even skim milk.

Cups? At about **6 months** put a small amount of water into a cup and offer it to your baby. Sippy cups are very popular, but are really glorified bottles. We recommend using a plain plastic cup without a lid or a straw cup. Be patient and continue to offer a cup, eventually your baby will get accustomed to and accomplish drinking from a cup. The earlier you introduce cups the easier the transition from bottle to cup will be.

Weaning? At 8 months of age the maximum number of formula bottles should be 3. At 10 months should be 2 bottles and recommend being completely **off the bottle at 1 year of age.** A well balanced diet for a toddler includes 2-3 servings of dairy per day.

What else? These are guidelines not rules. Be flexible. Don't measure food carefully. It is food and not medicine. Neither you nor your baby should find meal time stressful. As your baby gets older, they usually want to handle some of their own foods. This is the way babies learn to feed themselves. At first, you will be feeding your baby and gradually, your baby will do more with your supervision and assistance. This may not be efficient or neat, but it makes mealtime enjoyable for your baby. Also, take advantage of opportunities to have our baby join the family at a meal. The social interaction and opportunity to imitate make meals more enjoyable.

Don't hesitate to call for additional advice. I hope this information is helpful and am always available to answer any specific questions you may have about feeding your baby.