

## TIME FOR FUN AND FOOD

### ***When are babies ready to eat food?***

Most babies grow beautifully on breast milk or formula for 6 months and do not need solid food before this age. Before 6 months of age, most infants have a reflex that causes them to push their tongues against the spoon and makes it difficult for them to swallow the food properly. Introducing solid foods before 5 – 6 months of age may also increase the risk of developing obesity.

Your baby will show you that she is ready to eat in several ways:

1. Her physical development allows her to sit without support. When she can sit easily, she has usually lost the tongue thrust reflex.
2. She is watching you eat and demonstrates an interest in food.
3. She is able to reach out and grab objects.

### ***Why should I feed my baby solid food?***

1. By 6 months of age, your baby has outgrown the amount of iron that he received from his mother before he was born. Now, he needs an additional source of iron to make sure he does not become anemic.
2. Feeding your baby solid food will also help her learn many things, including how to swallow solid food. She will be exposed to many new tastes and textures, and soon your baby will learn how to feed herself.
3. Between 6 and 9 months of age, most of the calories your baby needs to grow will still come from milk. So, always feed your baby milk first before giving her solid food.

### ***What are the first foods a baby should eat?***

Since babies need extra iron, the best first food for babies is a source of iron. Meat is a good source of iron, as are the iron-fortified cereals. Once solid foods are introduced, babies do not absorb as much iron from breast milk. So this is another reason to make sure that the first food a baby receives contains iron.

### ***How do I introduce my baby to solid food?***

1. Choose a time when you and your baby are relaxed and ready to enjoy mealtime.
2. Have your baby sitting up in your lap or in a high chair.
3. Use a small spoon to feed your baby.
4. Choose a food that is pureed – so it is the consistency of cream of wheat
5. If you choose an iron-fortified cereal such as rice, barley, or oatmeal, you can mix the cereal with formula, water, or breast milk to make the cereal smooth and semi-liquid.
6. Your baby may look a little confused at first, and most of the first feeding may end up on his face, hands, and bib. Don't worry. Your baby will gradually become more comfortable with feedings. Try talking gently with your baby so he will feel relaxed.
7. As your baby begins to enjoy mealtimes, you can increase the consistency of the cereal or other foods so it is more like oatmeal. You can also gradually increase the amount of food you offer.
8. If your baby spits out the food, cries, or is not interested, stop the feeding. You can try again in a few days.

### ***Can I put cereal or baby food into my baby's bottle?***

Please do not place cereal or baby food into a bottle of formula. Your baby needs to learn the difference between liquid and solid foods. She needs to learn how to move the solid food around in her mouth. She also will learn how to take bites from a spoon and how to take a rest between bites. She will learn to stop eating when she is full. These are all experiences that will help your baby develop good eating habits.

### ***What is "Baby Led Weaning"?***

Baby led weaning is a British term that actually means baby initiated feeding of solids. Allowing your baby to feed herself solid foods gives her the opportunity to explore her environment, be independent, and regulate her intake. It may also make it possible for you to skip the pureed food stage. If you offer your baby table foods, please just make sure the foods are soft and an adult is with your child while he is eating. If your baby gags or chokes, you may want to try pureed foods first.

### ***What are the next foods I can give my baby?***

You can use plain cereal for several months – but most parents enjoy giving their babies a variety of new foods.

1. When introducing a new food, please wait 4 – 5 days before trying another new food so you can watch for an allergic reaction.
2. Meat is a good source of iron as well as zinc, and breastfed infants need both minerals. So, you may want to introduce meat early.
3. It is probably wise to introduce your baby to vegetables before introducing fruits.
4. Cereal, applesauce, and bananas may cause constipation. If your baby becomes constipated, having firm bowel movements, you can mix a little prune juice or pear juice into your baby's food. You can also mix 1 – 2 teaspoons of flax seed oil into your baby's food. If these ideas don't help, please call your baby's doctor.

***What should I look for when buying baby food?***

1. Choose single item foods, like squash or green beans.
2. Always read the label and make sure there is just one ingredient in the food. Sometimes foods that can cause allergies (like orange juice) are added to baby food.
3. Mixed baby foods, like baby dinners, have less nutritional value, so they are not a good value for your money.
4. Don't use baby desserts. They add extra calories that are not nutritious.

***Can I make my own baby food? Certainly! If you do, please remember...***

1. Do not add salt, sugar, or seasonings to your baby's food
2. You can freeze extra food in ice cube trays so that you can defrost small portions when needed.
3. Some vegetables like carrots, beets, spinach, collard greens, and turnips contain nitrates, a chemical that can cause an unusual type of anemia in babies. Do not give your baby these home-cooked foods. (Baby food purchased in the store has had the levels of nitrates monitored, so is fine for your baby.)

***What foods should I not give my baby?***

Although more children seem to be developing food allergies today, delaying the introduction of allergenic foods does not seem to protect children from food allergies.

1. Avoid foods that could cause choking – don't give your baby small foods such as popcorn, raisins, grapes, hotdogs cut in circles.
2. Avoid foods that might irritate the baby's digestive system such as highly spicy foods and greasy foods

***How might my baby show me that she is allergic to the food?***

If your baby has several episodes of vomiting after trying a new food, has diarrhea, develops a rash, or has swelling of her lips or eyes, she may be having an allergic reaction. Please stop the feeding and call 884-7478 for medical advice.

***How might my baby's stools change once I introduce solid foods?***

1. The baby's stools may become firmer and may have a different, stronger odor.
2. Some foods will appear in the stool undigested, so you may see peas or corn or red tomato skins in the stool.
3. Bananas often cause little black "threads" that look like worms to appear in the stool.
4. If your baby's stools become extremely loose, watery, or full of mucous, his intestinal tract may be a little irritated. Consider stopping the new food for a little while.
5. Irritation around the baby's anus does not mean that the baby is allergic to the food.

***How often should I feed my baby?***

Since most of your baby's nutrition will come from milk, you do not need to worry about how often you are offering solid foods. Feed your baby when it is fun, easy, and convenient for you. Most babies enjoy eating once a day at first. Let your baby show you when she is interested and how much she wants to eat.

As your baby grows and approaches 8 – 9 months of age, he will probably enjoy eating 2 – 3 times a day.

***Remember – feeding time means time for fun! Relax and enjoy your baby!***

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