

Southdale Pediatrics Guidelines for Starting Solid Foods

When can babies start solids?

Most infants are ready at 4-6 months of age.

Signs that your baby is ready to try solids:

- Steady head control. Your infant does not need to sit up alone but his/her head should not be wobbly.
- Showing interest. If you notice your baby watch you eat or drink and he/she seems focused on the utensil or cup as you bring it up to your mouth.

Choose a time of day when you have plenty of time and are not rushed. It takes extra time and patience when your baby is learning a new way of eating.

Do not make your baby eat from a spoon if he/she cries or turns away when you feed her. Go back to breastfeeding or bottle-feeding for a few days or a week before trying again. Remember that starting solid foods is a gradual process and each baby is different. Readiness to start solids will vary.

Always use a spoon to feed your baby solids. Do **not** put cereal or other solid foods in a bottle. Most babies start to lose the tongue-pushing reflex around 4 months of age. However, it is common for babies to push out the first few bites onto their face or bib.

To make it more enjoyable for your baby, give him/her a drink of breastmilk or formula first, then start with half a spoonful or less of solid food and then another sip of breastmilk or formula.

Encourage family meals from the beginning. Research suggests that having dinner together as a family has positive effects on the development of children.

What types of solid foods?

Infant cereals and baby foods contain the extra nutrients your baby requires at this age. There is no medical evidence that introducing solid food in any particular order has an advantage. It is most common to start with a single-grain cereal, such as rice, barley or oatmeal.

Once your baby learns to eat cereal, slowly add in other foods:

- Add one new food every 2-3 days.
- Watch for diarrhea, rash or vomiting after starting new foods.

If any of these occur, talk to your pediatrician before giving your infant that specific food again.

Within 2 or 3 months, your infant should have 3 solid meals per day and his/her daily diet will include breastmilk and/or formula, meats, vegetables, cereals, fruits, eggs and fish.

If your baby has been mostly breastfeeding, he/she may benefit from baby food made with meat. Baby food made with meat contains more easily absorbed sources of iron and zinc needed by 4 to 6 months of age.

(over)

At each of your infant's meals, he/she should be eating around 4 ounces (the amount in one small jar of strained baby food). Limit giving your baby processed foods made for adults and older children. These foods contain more salt and other preservatives.

If you want to give your baby fresh foods, use a blender or food processor, or simply mash softer foods with a fork. All fresh foods should be well cooked and soft. Do not add additional salt, sugar or seasonings.

*Note: Fresh foods are not bacteria-free so will spoil more quickly than food from a jar.

Root vegetables such as beets, turnips, carrots, collard greens and spinach may contain large amounts of nitrates, a chemical that can cause a type of anemia in young infants. It is safer to use commercially prepared forms of these foods.

When can babies eat more allergenic foods?

There is no evidence that waiting to introduce baby-safe (soft) allergy-causing foods, such as eggs, dairy, soy, peanuts or fish prevents food allergy.

After introducing a few solid foods tolerated well by your infant, you may start to introduce more highly allergenic foods (eggs, dairy, soy, wheat, peanut, tree nuts, fish and shellfish). It is important that these and all foods are in forms and textures appropriate for infants.

Recent studies show that there is no benefit to delaying the introduction of allergenic foods. In 2015, an important study showed that early introduction and regular feeding of peanut prevented the development peanut allergy. A good way to introduce peanut in infancy is to mix a small amount of peanut butter (creamy or smooth version) in cereal or yogurt.

Does my baby need water or juice?

After 6 months of age, you can begin offering your baby sips of water with his/her meals.

Babies younger than 12 months should not be given juice. After 12 months of age, allow only 100% fruit juices and less than 4 ounces per day. Never put juice or sweetened beverages in a bottle because this can cause dental caries (cavities in the teeth).

What changes to expect after starting solids?

When your baby starts eating solids, stools will become more solid and variable in color and have a stronger odor. Peas and other green vegetables may turn the stools a dark green color; beets may turn stool red. Undigested pieces of food, especially hulls of peas or corn may be seen in the stool. This is normal.