Starting Foods

By about 6 months of age, babies can sit with support, keep a steady head and neck, open their mouth to show they want food, and swallow rather than push food back onto their chin with their tongue. When your baby can do these things, it's time for solid foods. Don't be in a hurry. Solid foods do not help babies sleep all night.

Starting Foods Safely

- Do not feed cereal or other foods in a bottle or infant feeder because your baby may choke or get too little breast milk or formula, which could lead to malnutrition.
- Start by offering a small amount of a single ingredient, pureed, easy-to-swallow food by spoon 1 to 2 times per day. Feeding by spoon helps your baby learn to eat instead of just sucking and swallowing.
- Avoid feeding foods that may cause choking, such as small pieces of hard, raw vegetables or fruits; dry or tough chunks of meat; whole nuts and seeds; round pieces of food like hot dogs, popcorn and grapes; and sticky or gooey foods like candies, fruit snacks and marshmallows.
- Don't give honey or foods made with honey (including honey graham crackers) to infants under age one. Honey can make babies very sick.
- Never feed infants undercooked or raw animal foods like meat, poultry, fish, eggs and milk.
- Talk with your baby's healthcare provider about safely starting solids if your baby was born prematurely, has severe eczema, a known food allergy or issues swallowing or if you have any other concerns.

Drinking From An Open Cup

- Between 6 and 7 months of age, your baby can learn to hold a cup. Start by letting your baby play with an empty cup with no lid.
- Hold the open cup for your baby and let them learn to take small sips of water, expressed breast milk or formula. Infants under 12 months of age should not drink any other beverages, such as milk, soy beverage or juice, unless recommended by your healthcare provider.
- Expect some spills while your baby learns. Offer lots of practice and praise.
- Offering sippy cups that won't spill doesn't teach your baby how to sip and can increase the risk of tooth decay. If you want to use a sippy cup, use it only for a short time and only at mealtime.
- Cups with straws often have a lid and are also an option. Learning to drink from an open cup and a cup with a straw are skills your baby will always use.



Starting Foods

- Research does not support introducing foods in any certain order; however, zinc and iron are important nutrients around 6 months of age because babies start needing more for growth and development. Offer infant cereal or pureed meats in the beginning.
- Allow at least one day between foods to observe for possible allergic reactions such as rash, vomiting, diarrhea or difficulty breathing.
- When starting cereal, use 1 tablespoon of dry iron-fortified single grain cereal mixed with warmed expressed breast milk or formula until it is very thin. As your baby gets used to cereal, make it thicker.
- It is recommended to start foods such as peanut and nut products, eggs, yogurt/cheese/foods made with milk, wheat, sesame, soy, fish and shellfish around 6 months of age to decrease the risk of developing a food allergy. Once introduced, it is important to continue offering it 2 to 3 times a week.

Enjoy Feeding Your Baby

- You and your baby will do best with regular meals and snacks. Feed your baby when your family eats.
- Help your baby focus on eating by limiting distractions, such as turning off the TV. Your baby will enjoy the mealtime talk, and you will be there to help.
- Some babies will eat more and some will eat less. Don't worry if they don't eat a lot; they are learning new tastes and textures.
- Learn your baby's cues for hunger and respect your baby's signs of being full so they eat according to their body's needs. If they are closing their mouth, turning their head, or no longer interested in the food, they are likely full.
- When starting foods that might cause allergies, like those listed earlier, start with a small amount on the tip of a spoon. Wait for 10 to 15 minutes and then slowly feed the rest. Set 2 hours aside to watch your infant. Avoid nuts and seeds as these are choking hazards. Thin out peanut and nut butters and tahini (sesame) with fruit or vegetable purees, infant cereals, breast milk or formula to avoid choking.
- Advance the texture of the food from thin, runny and mashed to thicker, lumpy or finely chopped as you see your baby starting to chew and control the position of food in the mouth.
- Try new foods many times. Some babies need to be offered a food 15 to 20 times before they accept it!
- Healthy infants do not need extra water in the first 6 months of life. Breast milk or formula is your baby's main source of nutrition and hydration during the first year. After 6 months of age and the introduction of solid foods, babies can start getting used to the taste of small amounts of plain water. Using fluoridated drinking water (tap water or bottled water with fluoride added) or checking with your baby's healthcare provider about a fluoride supplement is recommended to help prevent future tooth decay.

For More Information

Talk to your local WIC agency staff.
For contact information,
call 800-532-1579, or visit
https://hhs.iowa.gov/wic or
www.signupwic.com.

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