

STARTING SOLID FOODS

Guidelines you can sink your teeth into

At a certain point in your baby's growth, breast milk or formula alone won't meet his or her nutritional needs. It's time then to start solid foods (like cereals and strained vegetables). We recommend waiting until at least 4 months of age before starting solids. There are other signs your baby is ready to start solids:

- He can sit with support
- He is at least 13 pounds and has at least doubled his birth weight
- He has good control of his head movements
- He is still hungry after 8-10 breast feedings or 32oz of formula a day

For the first couple months of eating solid foods (i.e. from 4-6 months of age), most of your baby's calories are still going to come from breast milk or formula. So don't get too stressed about pushing solid foods. Rather, think of this early time as a fun time during which you can experiment with different foods and flavors!

We recommend starting with rice cereal. It's bland, easy to digest and won't hurt the baby when it ends up in his nose (which it will). Make 1-2 tablespoons of the cereal according to the directions on the box. You can mix the powder with water, formula, or breast milk and give it twice daily. Once your child figures out that this is food and starts to enjoy it, you can increase the amount gradually. Barley or oatmeal cereals can also be used but try the rice first. Feed your baby cereal with a small rubberized or plastic spoon. It's better to put the cereal on a spoon than to put it in a bottle - your baby needs to learn the difference between what he drinks and what he eats.

After taking the rice for at least a week, you can start in on the vegetables. We recommend introducing vegetables before fruits, because many babies like fruits more and may not take to vegetables if they're introduced later. Again, start with a small amount of vegetables - try an ounce twice daily - and gradually increase. Introduce new veggies one at a time every 4-5 days. Vegetables should include carrots, peas, squash, green beans, and sweet potatoes. Fruits can be introduced once your child has a good appetite for a variety of veggies. Fruits can include applesauce, pears, peaches, bananas and prunes. Meats, like turkey and ham, have traditionally been held off until 8-9 months, but recent research shows that meats can be introduced as early as 4 months. We would recommend, however, going through the vegetables and fruits first.

You will notice that once your child starts eating solid foods, his milk intake will drop. This is okay, if your child is getting at least 20oz of breast milk or formula daily. Because babies start out at different sizes and grow at different rates, it's impossible for us to tell you exactly how much your baby should eat. How will you know if your baby is getting the right amount of food? You'll know because he'll continue to gain weight and continue to grow developmentally as well.

The above instructions are general guidelines. However, there are a few Absolute Rules for introducing solid foods to your baby.

- Do not introduce solid foods before 4 months of age. Too early introduction of solid foods can lead to food allergies, malabsorption, and other problems. Evidence suggests starting solids between 4 and 6 months is the safest bet.
- Introduce new foods one at a time, and don't introduce more than 2 new foods a week. This ensures that if your baby has a weird reaction to a new food, you'll be able to tell exactly which food it was.
- Avoid giving whole cow's milk or honey to a baby under 1 year of age. These can cause serious issues.
- Meat is safe as early as 4 months of age.
- Peanuts and peanut butter are considered safe as early as 6 months of age according to the latest research.
- Fish and eggs are also now considered safe in babies in small amounts, if there is no strong family history of allergy to these foods.
- Don't give more than 4oz of juice daily. It's too much simple sugar your baby doesn't need and can cut into the amount of milk your baby drinks. This is bad for growth and bone and tooth development.
- Mealtimes should be relaxing and enjoyable!