

STARTING MY BABY ON FOOD

Signs that your baby is ready for food:

- Double birth weight AND over 13 pounds
- Good head control
- Consistently drinking over 36 ounces a day or nursing more frequently, especially if suddenly waking more at night on a regular basis
- No tongue thrust
- ** Interest in food (tries to eat your food, watches you eat) **

Breast milk or formula has all the nutrients that your baby needs until 6 months old. Starting food too early may cause problems like allergies, constipation, diarrhea or gas and may promote obesity. Food given before a baby is ready may not be well digested. Food does NOT help a baby sleep longer. Breast milk and formula are specially designed to be digested easily by babies.

Many things have changed in the last decade. What's new?

- Food Texture
 - Old advice: only pureed foods.
 - New advice: start a variety of textures. By six months, babies can handle a variety of soft textures and soft finger foods, e.g. soft-cooked veggies, ripe fruit, finely minced or ground meat, deboned fish and grated cheese.
- Highly allergenic foods (nuts, peanuts, shellfish, egg, sesame, soy, wheat).
 - Old advice: avoid these foods until 2 or 3 or even 4 years old.
 - Current advice: introduce between 6 and 9 months old. Avoiding these foods seems to INCREASE the risk of food allergies. (This does NOT apply to a baby who already has a food allergy).
- What has not changed?
 - No honey until over 12 months. Honey may contain botulinum spores.
 - No milk until 12 months, although milk cooked in foods can be introduced by 9 months.

So, you've decided that your baby is ready for food, what now?

1. Start with 1 meal per day, at a time of day when you are relaxed. An ideal time is about 30-60 minutes before your baby usually eats so s/he is hungry but not starving. Meals should be fun, but may also be messy and time consuming, so be prepared. Use a bib (or feed naked!).

Babies younger than 6 months old have a "tongue thrust," -- they push food out rather than in. Some babies are not interested in food and get upset with feedings. If this persists, your baby is not ready for food. Wait a week or so and try again.

2. The first foods you start should be high in iron. Many people start with Rice cereal, but most baby rice cereal is WHITE rice (not a whole grain) and rice may make some babies constipated. If you use rice cereal, BROWN (whole grain) rice if preferable. Oatmeal does not cause constipation and is a whole grain, so it is a good choice. Mix the cereal with water, breast milk (or formula) or **Juice** (baby juice labeled *vitamin C fortified*). Start with a thin blend, and thicken as the baby tolerates it.

You can also start with pureed **meat, lentils or eggs** which are also high in iron.

3. You can then add **fruits** and **vegetables**, in any order. Some people believe that if you start vegetables before fruit, your child will like them more than fruit. That is not necessarily true. If your family never eats vegetables, your baby will not either.

Many babies may need to be introduced to a food many times (6 or more) before they decide they like it. Don't give up!

4. Start food in any order, but wait 2-3 days between each new food to observe for an allergic reaction (e.g. whole body rash, diarrhea).
5. **Babies don't need juice.** Juice can be used occasionally to treat constipation. Juice can be used to mix with cereal at first, but switch to the fruit, which is much more nutritious, once the baby likes thicker food.
6. Water. Your baby does not need much water for the first few months. Many babies love to try and drink from mom or dad's glass. You can start to teach your baby to drink from a cup by about 6 months old and water is perfect – it doesn't stain and isn't sticky. Once your baby understands how to drink from your cup, you can use a Sippy cup if desired.
7. See our other handout for making your own baby food.

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER:

- Use only **single ingredient** foods at first. Read the label. Don't pay for fillers.
- Start foods **one at a time** and give each new food for **several days** (2-3). Look for allergic reactions (diarrhea, body rash, vomiting). A rash only around the mouth is not an indication of an allergy.
- **NEVER put food in the bottle.** A baby who is ready for food, is ready to eat it from a spoon.
- **NEVER add salt, sugar, butter, etc.** Read labels to make sure these are not added ingredients.
- For the first year, **avoid:** honey and choking hazards (hot dogs, popcorn, nuts, peanut butter, hard candy, seeds, raw veggies, any food you cannot smash with your fork).

If **food allergies** run in your family, please discuss with your physician.

For more information, go to the website www.healthychildren.org.

Click on "Ages and Stages" and look under "Feeding and Nutrition."

For information on making your own baby food, see our handout *Making Your Own Baby Food*.