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Solid (Strained) Foods

When should I start feeding my child solid foods?

The best time to begin using a spoon to feed your child is when your baby can sit with some support and move his head to participate in the feeding process. This time is usually between 4 and 6 months of age. Breast milk and commercial formulas meet all of your baby's nutritional needs until 4 to 6 months of age. Introducing strained foods earlier just makes feeding more complicated. Research has shown that in most cases solid foods won't help your baby sleep through the night. The only exceptions are those few breast-fed babies who are not getting enough calories or gaining enough weight.

What types of foods should I feed my child?

- **Cereals** Cereals are usually the first solid food added to your baby's diet. Generally these are introduced to infants between 4 and 6 months of age. Cereals should be fed with a small spoon and should not be given in the baby's bottle. This is because an infant should be taught to differentiate between what he eats and what he drinks. Start with rice cereal, which is less likely to cause allergies than other cereals. Barley and oatmeal may be tried 2 or 3 weeks later. A mixed cereal should be added to your baby's diet only after each kind of cereal in the mixed cereal has been separately introduced.
- **Vegetables and fruit** Strained or pureed vegetables and fruits are the next solid foods introduced to your baby. The order in which you add vegetables and fruits to your baby's diet is not important. However, you should introduce only one new food at a time and no more than 3 new foods per week.
- **Meat and protein alternatives** By 7 to 8 months of age your baby should be ready for strained or pureed meats and protein alternatives (such as beans, peas, lentils, cottage cheese, and yogurt). Babies who are only getting breast milk and no other solids can develop a zinc and iron deficiency. This can be prevented by starting pureed red meats between 6 and 8 months.
- **Homemade Baby Foods** Between 8 and 12 months of age, introduce your baby to mashed table foods or junior foods (also called stage 3 foods). If you make your own baby foods in a baby-food grinder or electric blender, be sure to add enough water to get a consistency that your baby can easily swallow. For individual portions, pour these homemade baby foods into ice cube trays, freeze them, then remove them and store them in plastic freezer bags.

How much baby food should I give?

Start with a few small spoonfuls. At first your baby may just want a taste. Then gradually work up to larger portions. A good rule of thumb during the first year of life is 2 to 4 tablespoons (1 to 2 ounces) of each kind of food per meal. If your child is still hungry after finishing that amount, serve her more.

Are there foods I should not feed my child?

Egg whites, wheat, peanut butter, fish, and orange juice may be more likely to cause allergies than other solid foods, but this is controversial. Avoid adding these foods to your baby's diet until 1 year of age, especially if your infant has other allergies. Also, avoid giving your child honey during the first year of life.

How do I spoon feed my child?

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Place food on the middle of the tongue. If you place it in front, your child will probably push it back at you. Some infants get off to a better start if you place the spoon between their lips and let them suck off the food.

Some children constantly bat at the spoon or try to hold it while you are trying to feed them. These children need to be distracted with finger foods or given another spoon to hold.

By the time they are 1 year old, most children want to try to feed themselves and can do so with finger foods. By 15 to 18 months of age, most children can feed themselves with a spoon and no longer need a parent's help to eat.

When can my child have finger foods?

Finger foods are small, bite-size pieces of soft foods. They can be introduced between 9 and 10 months of age or whenever your child develops a pincer grip.

Most babies love to feed themselves. Since most babies will not be able to feed themselves with a spoon until 15 months of age, finger foods keep them actively involved in the feeding process.

Good finger foods are dry cereals (Cheerios, Rice Krispies, etc.), slices of cheese, pieces of scrambled eggs, slices of canned fruit (peaches, pears, or pineapple), slices of soft fresh fruits (especially bananas), crackers, cookies, and breads.

Should I give my child snacks?

Once your baby goes to 3 meals a day, or eats at 5-hour intervals, he may need small snacks to tide him over between meals. Most babies begin this pattern between 6 and 9 months of age. The midmorning and midafternoon snack should be a nutritious, nonmilk food. Fruits and dry cereals are recommended. If your child is not hungry at mealtime, cut back on the snacks or eliminate them.

Can my child eat table food?

Your child should be eating the same meals you eat by approximately 1 year of age. This assumes that your diet is well balanced and that you carefully dice any foods that would be difficult for your baby to chew. Avoid foods that he could choke on such as raw carrots, candy, peanuts or other nuts, and popcorn.

What foods contain iron?

Throughout our lives we need iron in our diet to prevent anemia. Certain foods are especially good sources of iron. Red meats, fish, and poultry are best. Some young children will only eat lunch meats, and the low-fat ones are fine. Adequate iron is also found in iron-enriched cereals, beans of all types, egg yolks, peanut butter, raisins, prune juice, sweet potatoes, and spinach.

Does my child need vitamins?

If your child is between 2 and 12 months old and you are breast-feeding, you will need to give your child a vitamin D supplement. Formula fed infants get all the vitamins they need from the formula. After your child is 1 year old and is eating a balanced diet, added vitamins are not necessary. If your child is a picky eater, give him 1 chewable vitamin pill twice a week.

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