



Solid Foods for the Breastfed Baby

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When should I start feeding my child solid foods?

The best time to begin using a spoon to **feed** your child is at around 6 months of age, when your baby can sit with some support and move his head to participate in the **feeding** process. Babies also have less risk of colds and diarrhea if they wait until around 6 months for solids. Breast milk meets all of your baby's nutritional needs until 6 months of age. Research has shown that in most cases solid foods won't help your baby sleep through the night.

Breastfed infants need high- iron solids because the iron in breastmilk is harder to absorb once infants start on solids, and the amount of iron in breastmilk might not be sufficient for some babies past 6 months. Many foods are high in iron, particularly meat, legumes such as beans, peas and lentils, and dark leafy vegetables such as kale and spinach. Dried fruits such as prunes, dates and raisins are also high in iron and can be stewed to soften, then pureed. All of these can be first foods for infants. See the section on Iron below.

Generally it is best to introduce no more than 1 new food every 2-3 days, in order to watch for allergic reactions.

What types of foods should I feed my child?

- **Cereals.** Cereals should not be given in the baby's bottle, but rather as a solid food. Iron- fortified cereals are preferred. The cereals do not need to be introduced in any particular order. Rice cereal (even organic rice) is high in arsenic, so it is recommended to limit rice cereal to no more than 2 servings a week. Offer a variety of infant fortified cereals instead, such as quinoa, barley, and oats.
- **Vegetables and fruit.** The order in which you add vegetables and fruits to your baby's diet is not important. Fresh organic produce is ideal, but frozen vegetables and fruits are healthy, and usually have few chemical contaminants such as pesticides compared to fresh nonorganic produce.
- **Meat and protein alternatives** At 6 months of age your baby is ready for pureed meats and protein alternatives (such as beans, peas, lentils, tofu, cottage cheese, and yogurt). Breastfed infants require solids that are high in iron, as described above.
- Foods that are known to cause allergies, such as fish, nuts, peanuts, and eggs, no longer should be avoided in early infancy. Early introduction of these foods at 6-7 months has been shown to decrease the risk of food allergies. If an infant has evidence of allergies or there is a strong family history of food allergies, it is best to discuss introduction of these foods with the infant's health care provider.

How should I breastfeed my child when starting solids?

- Most breastfeeding infants continue to nurse 4-8 times a day when starting solids. Infants usually nurse in the am before breakfast, in between breakfast and lunch, after lunch, in the mid-afternoon, before and/or after dinner, and often a few times in the evening and not uncommonly at night.
- As babies approach 9 months and are eating hearty meals three times a day, they will often decrease nursing to 4-5 times day. The pattern of nursing can be quite variable for every mother-infant pair,

but generally infants still need to nurse at least 4 times a day for proper nutrition until at least 1 year of age.

Are there foods I should not feed my child?

- Do not give your child raw honey during the first year of life, due to the risk of botulism. Honey that is baked or cooked in a food is fine.
- Juice is not considered healthy for infants or toddlers, due to its high sugar content.
- It is recommended to limit water to 4-6 ounces a day until 1 year of age. Instead, babies should have breastmilk or formula as a main fluid.
- Foods should be cut, softened or avoided to prevent choking. The most common foods that cause choking in young children include peanuts, popcorn, raisins, fruits with pits, hard candies, whole chunks of hot dogs, raw vegetables, whole grapes, whole olives.
- Cows milk should not be a substitute for breastmilk until one year of age, but other dairy products may be added at 6 months, such as yogurt and cheese.

How do I spoon feed my child?

- Introduce the spoon towards the front of the mouth. Babies who are learning to take solids sometimes will tongue-thrust the food out of their mouths. In a short time of practicing this will resolve.
- Most children want to feed themselves with their fingers by 9 months of age, and this should be encouraged. At 12 months of age, most children do not need pureed baby 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 at around 9 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.

Should I give my child snacks?

Once your baby eats 3 meals a day or 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 mid-afternoon snack should be a nutritious food that would be typically given at a meal. 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, as above.

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. 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?

After your child is 1 year old and is eating a balanced diet, 400 units of vitamin D is usually the only vitamin needed, unless otherwise directed by your physician. Some children also need added iron at 9-12 months of age. If your child is a very picky eater, a multivitamin is fine.