Starting Family Foods

Introducing your baby to solid foods

FOR PARENTS OF 0 TO 12 MONTH OLD BABIES

NSW GOVERNMENT Health

BIRTH TO AROUND 6 MONTHS

Breastmilk or infant formula only

Breastmilk provides adequate fluid up to around 6 months.

Developmental Stage

Can suck and swallow milk

Formula fed babies only may need to be offered cooled boiled water at times of heat stress (such as hot weather or fever).

See 1. Why Wait Until Around Six Months before Introducing Solid Foods?

AROUND 6 MONTHS

Continue breastmilk or infant formula.

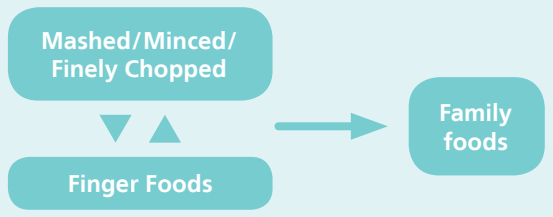
Breastmilk remains an important source of nutrients, immunological support and comfort beyond 6 months.

Small amounts of cooled boiled water may be offered in a cup.

Developmental Stage

Stronger suck	Biting
Shows interest in food	Chewing developing
Begins chewing	Clearing spoon with lips
Can swallow solids	Interested in feeding self

At around 6 months most babies will be able to manage a variety of textures. Some babies will prefer to start with soft foods (mashed or grated) from a spoon and others will prefer to start with finger foods such as steak strips and cut up fruit.



As long as iron-rich foods (*) are included in first foods, foods can be introduced in any order and at a rate that suits your baby.

First foods to include:

- Iron-enriched rice cereal*
- Minced, stewed or grated meat, poultry & liver (cook, freeze then grate)*
- Fish
- Cooked legumes, tofu and tempeh*
- Cooked vegetables (e.g. carrot, potato, pumpkin)
- Fruit (e.g. apple, banana, pear, melon)
- Cooked egg (yolk & white)
- Bread, pasta, toast fingers and rusks
- Nut pastes/spreads
- Full-fat cheese, custard and yoghurt

Until 12 months cow's milk should only be used in small amounts to mix with family foods and in cooking.

FROM 12 MONTHS

Continue breastfeeding for as long as you and your baby want to keep going.

Breastfeeding continues to provide health benefits in your baby's second year of life and beyond.

Developmental Stage

Developed chewing movement

Jaw control

Most children should be eating family foods and drinking from a cup by 12 months.

From 12 months full cream cow's milk can be offered from a cup.

If you want your baby to grow up on a plant-based diet (vegan diet) continue breastfeeding for as long as possible and consult a dietitian for advice regarding iron and B12 supplementation.

Toddler follow-on milks are not necessary.

A variety of nutritious foods from the Five Food Groups is recommended.

7. UNSUITABLE FOODS

Honey:
Can have bacteria in it which can cause severe illness (botulism) in infants under 12 months old.

Nuts:
Babies can choke on nuts and similar hard foods. Nut pastes and spreads can be offered from 6 months.

Tea:
Contains substances which reduce your baby's ability to absorb iron and other essential minerals.

Fruit juice:
Offers no nutritional benefits to babies under 12 months. Eating whole fruit is recommended.

Cow's Milk:
is not recommended as baby's main milk until after 12 months. Use breastmilk or infant formula.

Milk from other animal sources:
Including goat's and sheep's milk is not suitable due to differences in protein and electrolyte levels.

Low fat and reduced fat milks:
Are not recommended for children under 2 years. After 2 years of age children can drink reduced fat milks (2-2.5% fat). After 5 years of age children can drink low fat milk (e.g. skim milk).

Plant-based milks:
E.g. soy, rice, oat, coconut, and almond milks are not an appropriate source of nutrition for babies under 12 months. Calcium enriched soy, rice and oat beverages can be used after 12 months if under supervision by a health professional.

Caffeinated and sugar-sweetened drink:
Do not offer babies coffee or sugar sweetened drinks (e.g. soft drinks, cordials, energy drinks).

8. ALLERGIES

There is no particular order advised for the introduction of solid foods or rate that new foods should be introduced, as long as iron rich foods are introduced first.

If allergies are a problem in your family seek advice from a health professional. The following foods are more commonly associated with allergies in babies: milk, eggs, seafood/fish, nuts, tree nuts, sesame, soy and wheat. There is no need to delay introduction of these foods after 6 months.

9. FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information:

Early Childhood Health Centres:
For centre locations throughout NSW, consult your local white/yellow pages or whitepages.com.au under the heading 'Community Health Centre' or 'Early Childhood Health Centre'.

Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA):
Breastfeeding Helpline 1800 686 268
www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Tresillian 24-hour Parents Helpline:
(02) 9787 0855 or 1300 272 736
(freecall outside Sydney metropolitan area)
www.tresillian.net/

Karitane Care Line:
1300 227 464
www.karitane.org.au

Motherisafe. Medications in Pregnancy and Lactation Service:
Phone: (02) 9382 6539 or 1800 647 848
(freecall outside Sydney metropolitan area)

Personal Health Record (known as the 'Blue Book'):
www.health.nsw.gov.au

Healthy Kids website:
www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au

References:
- Infant Feeding Guidelines NHMRC 2012
- Exclusive Breastfeeding Statement WHO 2011
- Australian Dietary Guidelines NHMRC 2013

Developed by Nutrition Services and Central Coast Kids and Families, Central Coast Local Health District, in partnership with the Australian Breastfeeding Association and mothers of the Central Coast. The information in this leaflet is intended as a general guide for parents of healthy full term babies. For more copies of this pamphlet contact the Better Health Centre Ph (02) 9879 0443, Fax (02) 9879 0994.

Revised September 2015
SHPN (CPH) 150525
ISBN 978-1-76000-298-5 (print) ISBN 978-1-76000-299-2 (online)

1. WHY WAIT UNTIL AROUND 6 MONTHS BEFORE INTRODUCING SOLID FOODS?

Both the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Infant Feeding Guidelines (2012) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) Exclusive Breastfeeding Statement (2011) recommend introducing solid foods at around 6 months.

There are no *benefits to introducing solid foods before this time*.

Introducing solid foods too early can cause problems such as:

- increased risk of food allergies
- decreased breastmilk production
- increased exposure to germs
- increased load on your baby's kidneys
- constipation, from poor digestion

If you feel your baby needs to start solids before 6 months of age, contact your local Child and Family Health Nurse or General Practitioner. *See 9. 'Further information'.*

2. THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN FIRST INTRODUCING SOLID FOODS

As long as iron-rich foods are included, first foods can be introduced in any order and at a rate that suits your baby. *See 'Around 6 months' for information about iron-rich foods.*

Breast or bottle-feed your baby first. Breastmilk or formula is still the most important part of your baby's diet.

At first, solid foods are extras and new tastes for your baby.

Many babies will only eat a tiny amount to start with (less than ½ teaspoon). Others may want more.

Mothers often find that a good time of day to start is when baby is not too tired or too hungry.

Babies have very sensitive taste buds at this stage and don't need salt, sugar or other flavourings added to their food.

Some babies may not like the taste of new foods. They may need to be offered foods many times before they learn to like them.

Avoid nutrient poor foods with high levels of saturated fat, sugar, or salt (e.g. cakes, biscuits, confectionery and potato chips).

3. SAFE FOOD HANDLING AND HYGIENE

Babies can easily get sick from food poisoning:

1. Wash hands with warm running water and soap before preparing food for your baby or feeding your baby.
2. Clean food preparation areas before and after preparing food. Use clean utensils.
3. If preparing formula, sterilise bottles and other equipment.
4. Wash fruit and vegetables well-even vegetables that are to be peeled and cooked.
5. Label and date food to be refrigerated or frozen. Prepared food can be stored in the body of the fridge for up to 48 hours. Hot food can be put straight into the refrigerator.
6. Thaw frozen food in the refrigerator, not on the bench (at room temperature). Defrost in the microwave if you are going to use the food straight away.
7. Check the temperature of the food by tasting it with a clean spoon. Use another clean spoon to feed your baby. Don't put your baby's food in your mouth then give it to your baby.
8. Once food has been warmed and offered to your baby, throw out any left in the bowl.
9. It is important to realise that 'off' food can look, smell and taste OK. So, 'if in doubt, throw it out'.

Eating safely

As babies are more likely to choke on food than an adult, it is important:

- to watch them while they are eating
- not to let them move around while they are eating
- to use a safety harness when your baby is in a high chair or low chair
- to avoid giving them nuts, small hard foods (such as raw or undercooked pieces of hard fruit and vegetables, popcorn, rice cakes and cocktail frankfurts) and small slippery foods (such as whole grapes and whole cherry tomatoes).

If using water to mix with baby foods, boil and cool it first. After heating food, always mix it thoroughly and test its temperature before offering it to your baby.

4. FINGER FOODS

Babies will begin to actively explore their world and therefore this is a great time to take advantage of their natural interest in food.

To help your baby learn to eat family foods, it is important he or she practice. Offer an increasing variety of foods, presented in different sizes and textures. Discovering, handling and chewing food assists the development of social skills and promotes the pleasure of eating.

Babies enjoy foods that they can pick up with their hands and eat by themselves. Wash your baby's hands with warm soapy water first.

Suggestions

1. Boiled or steamed vegetables – potato, pumpkin, carrot circles, zucchini strips, beans, peas or slices of beetroot. Hard vegetables need to be well cooked and offered as large chunks.
2. Raw foods – whole small banana, tomato slices, a small ripe pear, a small whole orange, peeled.
3. Cooked lean meat may be cut into strips for chewing or small thin pieces to be picked up with the thumb and forefinger.

- Remember eating needs to be a safe and enjoyable activity.
- Always remain with your baby while they are eating.
- Eating is a social occasion.
- Eating healthy meals together provides the best example for your baby.

This photograph indicates texture and variety, not quantity.

For more information about giving finger foods, talk to a Child and Family Health Nurse.

5. COMMERCIAL BABY FOODS

These can be useful, **but**:

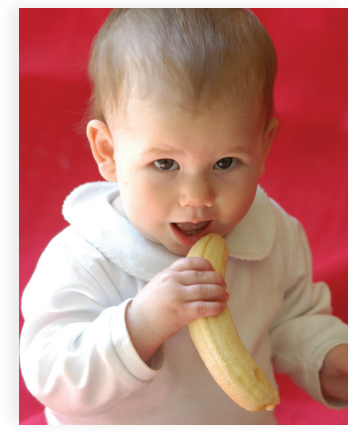
- They are more expensive than home cooked foods.
- They may look, taste and smell different from family foods and so don't help babies learn about the foods that the rest of the family eats.
- When they are used often, babies may become so used to them that they are reluctant to change to family foods.
- Regular use of 'squeezy' food pouches limits the variety of food texture and learning about food (look, smell and feel). The regular sucking of food can cause teeth to decay and affect speech development.

Home prepared food can be just as convenient. Individual food can be cooked, mashed and then frozen in ice cube trays.

Many food products marketed for babies (e.g. baby custards/yoghurts/pureed fruit) offer no nutritional advantage over regular products.

6. WHAT ELSE?

Sleep



It is common for children to wake once or twice a night even into their second year. There is no evidence to support the idea that introducing solids early will help your baby sleep longer at night.

Weight

Some people may think that small babies need to start solids early to help them gain weight more quickly. Others may think that large babies need to start solids early in order to keep growing well. Breastmilk provides all the nutrients a healthy baby needs for around the first 6 months of life whatever their size.

How much food?

Babies are individuals. Some babies eat enthusiastically and others will take longer to want more than just a taste. If you continue to offer a variety of healthy foods, your baby will eat to their 'appetite'. Remember, milk is still a very important food for babies for at least the first 12 months.

Fussy eaters

Almost all babies will learn to accept family foods if they are offered in a positive, friendly way. If you have any concerns, check with your local Child and Family Health Nurse or General Practitioner.