

Introducing Solid Foods

Nutrition science and knowledge has dramatically increased in the years since Mrs. Gerber formulated her baby foods. Current guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend NO solid foods in babies' diets, whether breast or formula fed, until 6 months of age. When we do introduce solids, we now have improved information on the nutritional content of food, and how early introduction of sweet flavors can make accepting other food flavors more difficult and even contribute to childhood obesity.

There is conclusive evidence that babies are unable to digest foods other than breast milk or formula until 6 months of age or later. Giving baby food to young infants therefore provides no nutritional value. Recent research also demonstrates that vegetables and meats are more easily digested and a better source of iron and nutrients such as zinc, than cereal or fruits. Further, delaying the introduction of sweet foods such as fruits will help your baby also develop tastes for other, more nutritious food types, hopefully throughout their lives.

Although previous generations of new parents started their babies on rice cereal, I recommend starting with vegetables and meats first, as follows:

- 1) Yellow and Orange Vegetables (carrots, sweet potato, squash)
- 2) Green vegetables (peas, beans, zucchini, spinach, avocado-technically a fruit, but not sweet)
- 3) Meats (chicken, turkey, beef, lamb)
- 4) Cereal (rice, oats, barley). If your baby is constipated (hard stools), try oats or barley before rice
- 5) Fruits (apples, pears, bananas, plums) Avoid citrus until 9-12 months because the acidity could cause diaper rash or stomach upset

When starting solid foods, remember that this is a gradual introduction, and your baby will continue to get most of his nutrition from breast milk or formula. When starting solid foods, don't make your baby eat if he cries or turns away. Go back to milk for a couple of days, and then reintroduce a different food. If your baby has a reaction to a food (gas, vomiting or diarrhea), discontinue it temporarily. When you reintroduce the food later, he will probably be fine. True "food allergy" is rare, and will usually cause a rash on the body, swelling or redness in and around the mouth, or very rarely, blood in the stool. Please contact me if your baby has any of these reactions.

In practical terms, I suggest starting with 2-4 teaspoons of a vegetable, and increasing the amount daily up to 15 teaspoons, or a full baby jar (2.5 ounces). You can introduce a new flavor every 3-4 days to start the meal, finishing with a previously given food. During the first 3-4 weeks, you should only give her one pureed meal per day until you have introduced a variety of vegetables and meats. You shouldn't notice any reduction in her milk intake.

After about a month, when your baby is ready to start cereal, you can add a second meal. I recommend trying the various cereals prepared with breast milk, formula, or water, and then adding fruits after 2 weeks.

As your baby's ability to chew and swallow develops, you can increase the thickness and texture of the foods (Stage 2-3). You can introduce dairy products (cottage cheese, yogurt, soft cheese) after 7-8 months when your baby is able to tolerate thicker foods. Although many parents are eager to share their food with their babies, I don't recommend introducing the typically high salt and sugar content of table foods (aside from the above mentioned dairy products) until at least 9 months.

When your baby begins solid foods, you will notice that his stools will become more solid and variable in color. Because we've added sugars and fats to his diet, the stool will also have a stronger odor. The colors will change based on foods such as peas or beets.

At around 6 months, your baby is able to sleep 8-10 hours without eating. This is developmental and not related to the start of solid foods. Even if she wakes crying and will not fall asleep without a bottle or breastfeeding, it is not hunger that is waking her up. It means that she is conditioned to drink or nurse to fall asleep in her crib. We can talk about methods of sleep training during your checkups.

Foods to avoid until age 1:

Egg white, peanut butter and fish (food allergies)

Honey (botulism risk)

Chunks of foods such as fruits and meats, or popcorn (choking hazards)

When your baby comes in for her nine-month checkup, I will check her blood count (estimate of iron level) and decide if she is ready for whole milk. We will also talk about introducing table foods during this visit.

This is an exciting time for your baby and your family. It's a good time to start traditions like family meals, although these can at first get quite messy!