



FIRST FOODS, BIG SMILES

Helping Your Baby Explore the
World of Tastes and Textures



Introducing Baby's First Foods

Learning to eat solid foods is a big step in your baby's development. They experience the tastes and textures of different foods and build skills for eating and feeding themselves.

While every baby is different, most are ready to start solid foods around 6 months of age.

Why Start Solid Foods?

Up to 6 months of age, breast milk or infant formula provides all the food and drink babies need. From 6 months, babies:

- need extra nutrients from solid foods, especially iron.
- are more willing to accept new foods than older babies.
- can begin to use a spoon and drink from a cup.
- can practice chewing and swallowing which builds the muscles they need for talking.

When your baby starts solid foods keep offering breast milk or infant formula. This still provides most of their nutrition for the first 12 months.



Is My Baby Ready?

Some signs a baby may be ready to start solid foods are when they:

- have good head control and can sit up with some support.
- can control their tongue and move food around in their mouth.
- show interest in what others are eating, looking at, or reaching for food.
- seem hungry after a full breast milk or infant formula feed, or want to feed more often.

If your baby is around 6 months and showing signs of being ready, try offering them a smooth food on a spoon. If they don't seem interested, don't push them to eat. Try again in a few days.

Starting solid foods should be a relaxed and enjoyable experience for your baby and you. Never pressure a baby to eat.

Learning to Eat

Each baby learns to eat solid foods at their own pace. Some stages in learning to eat are:

- from **6 months** - first tastes of smooth foods,
- by **7-9 months** - learning to chew. Most babies can soon manage thicker textures and mashed foods with soft lumps.
- by around **8 months** - learning to self-feed. Offer soft “finger foods” they can hold, bite or chew. Encourage them to use a spoon and drink from a cup.

From 12 months most babies can manage nutritious foods enjoyed by the rest of the family. These can be mashed or cut up to make them safe.

Babies learn to eat solid foods at different rates. It is important to follow your baby's lead.

Reflexes

- At first, your baby may spit food out or push it out with their tongue (tongue-thrust reflex). This does not mean they don't like food. These are normal reflexes which will fade in time.
- Coughing and gagging are normal protective reflexes that can happen when babies start eating or go from smooth to lumpier foods. These can alarm parents but don't mean a baby is not ready for eating soft lumps. Stay calm, reassure your baby and encourage them to keep chewing and swallowing.

How to Start Solid Foods

Start by offering your baby a smooth food after a breastfeed or formula feed.

- Do this **once a day** and increase to 2-3 times **if baby wants it**. Foods can be introduced in any order. Include iron-rich foods to help prevent iron deficiency.
- Then add foods such as pureed vegetables, fruits, or dairy. Keep giving breast milk or infant formula. This is still your baby's main source of nutrition. Over time the balance changes towards more foods and less milk.
- **Follow your baby's lead** and gradually change the texture of foods as they get better at eating - smooth, mashed, minced or cooked and chopped. Encourage their efforts to feel themselves.

By 12 months, most babies are having 3 small meals and 2-3 snacks each day as well as breast milk or infant formula.

Always stay with babies while they eat and make sure they are safe.

The 5 Food Groups

To support your baby's healthy growth and development, aim to offer a variety of meals and snacks each day from all five food groups. This helps provide the essential nutrients your baby needs and encourages healthy eating habits from the start.

- **Vegetables** – try soft-cooked carrots, mashed peas, or pumpkin
- **Fruits** – offer mashed banana, stewed apple, or avocado
- **Grains** – include iron-fortified baby cereal, soft-cooked rice, or whole grain toast fingers
- **Dairy** – use plain full-fat yogurt, cheese strips, or small amounts of milk in cooking
- **Protein** – introduce cooked and finely minced meat, mashed beans or lentils, or scrambled eggs

Offering a variety of foods with different colors, textures, and flavors can make mealtimes more enjoyable and help your baby build a positive relationship with food.

“ Ensure your little ones
grow up healthy, happy,
and strong! ”



Preparing Foods

Prepare foods from fresh ingredients as much as you can. These will be nutritious and babies learn the color, taste and texture of natural foods.

- Slow cook meat to make it soft and easier to eat.
- Puree foods such as cooked meat, poultry, fish, tofu or beans with a blender or stick mixer.
- Boil or steam vegetables or fruit in a little water, and puree, mash or chop.

Freezing home-cooked meals in small portions makes it easier to give baby nutritious meals and snacks. Do not add salt or sugar to their food.



Tips for Feeding Your Baby

- **Prepare for a mess!** Be patient and let baby touch, squish, and drop foods. This supports healthy development, hand-eye coordination and the pleasure of eating. A plastic sheet on the floor can help.
- **Avoid distractions.** Turn the TV off, put toys away and pets outside so they can focus on the meal.
- **Eat with baby - make meals a social occasion.** Babies learn from watching others. Show them how you bite and chew. They are more likely to try new foods if they see others eating them.
- **Let baby eat to their appetite.** Babies are good at knowing whether they are hungry or full. When they have had enough they may:
 - turn their head away.
 - not open their mouth for the spoon.
 - push the spoon away.
 - lean back in their chair.

As a parent, you decide what foods to offer—your child decides how much to eat.

It's normal for a baby's appetite to change from day to day. Some days they may eat a lot, and other days just a little.

Trust your baby to know when they're hungry or full. Respecting their cues helps build healthy eating habits and a positive relationship with food.

First Tastes

Offer your baby smooth, pureed foods on a spoon. Foods can be introduced in any order as long as you include iron-rich foods.

Iron-rich foods are in blue and bold below.

Meat, poultry, fish, tofu, eggs, beans

- **Meat, chicken or fish** that is well cooked, with skin, bones and gristle removed - pureed with stick mixer or blender - no added salt.
- **Meat, chicken or fish** with added vegetables - pureed.
- **Pureed tofu or silken tofu.**

Grains

- **Iron-fortified baby cereal** such as rice, oat or wheat based mixed with full-cream cow's milk, breast milk or infant formula.

Vegetables and beans

- **Pureed baked beans.**
- Cooked and pureed vegetables such as cauliflower, pumpkin, peas, zucchini, potato and carrots.
- **Cooked and pureed lentils and beans.**

Fruits

- Soft fruits: well-mashed or pureed such as a banana. Hard fruits: cooked until soft and pureed such as an apple, apricot, pear, or berries.

Dairy

- Full-fat, natural, smooth yogurt such as Greek yogurt.
- Custards.

Introducing common allergy-causing foods

- Add a small amount of smooth ricotta or yogurt (cow's milk) to pureed vegetables or fruits, or mix cow's milk into baby cereal.
- Add a small amount of **hard-boiled egg** to vegetables.
- Add a small amount of **tofu** (soy), tahini (sesame) or **smooth peanut butter** to pureed fruits or vegetables.
- **Canned salmon or tuna, or steamed boneless white fish** can be mashed or shredded and stirred into vegetables.

Learning to Chew

When baby is used to smooth foods, offer thicker, mashed foods with soft lumps.

Iron-rich foods are in blue and bold below.

Meat, Poultry, Fish, Tofu, Eggs, Beans

- Meat or poultry cooked, minced or finely chopped.
- Flaked fish such as canned tuna or salmon with bones and skin removed.
- Mashed tofu.
- Well-cooked scrambled egg, or mashed hard-boiled egg.

Grains

- Porridge (oats). Wholegrain breakfast biscuits.
- **Iron-fortified baby cereal made to a thicker texture.**
- Add pasta, rice, couscous or quinoa to meals to make a lumpier texture.

Vegetables and Beans

- Mashed or diced cooked vegetables.
- Mashed avocado.
- **Mashed beans such as baked beans, chickpeas, kidney beans or lentils.**

Fruit

- Soft chopped or mashed fruits.

Dairy

- Yogurt with soft lumps.
- Grated cheese.

Introducing common allergy-causing foods

- Mashed **hard-boiled egg** with avocado and/or vegetables. Mix hummus or
- **smooth peanut butter** into mashed foods. Mix soft flakes of **fish or silken tofu**
- into mashed potato or other vegetables. Use wheat-based breakfast cereals
- such as **Weetabix** or add couscous or small pasta to savory meals.

Self-Feeding

Babies enjoy feeding themselves. Foods should be safe such as mashed, grated, minced or cooked until soft and chopped. Avoid hard foods as babies can choke.

Iron-rich foods are in blue and bold below.

Meat, Poultry, Fish, Tofu, Eggs, Beans

- **Strips of well-cooked lean meat, chicken, or fish.**
- **Pieces of soft, well-cooked meats from casserole.**
- **Cubes of tofu.**
- **Meatballs and meat or fish patties.** Cooked meat or fish can be finely chopped and mixed with mashed potato then shaped into balls or patties.
- **Hard-boiled egg** or strips of omelet.

Grains

- Strips of bread or toast, or sandwiches with spreads or fillings such as avocado, hummus, vegemite, **smooth peanut butter**, and cream cheese.
- Cooked pasta shapes such as spirals. Savory biscuits such as rice crackers or Ritz.

Vegetables and beans

- Soft, cooked cubes or sticks of vegetables such as pumpkin, broccoli, zucchini, or potatoes.
- Thick mashed potato - try rolling into balls.
- **Baked beans and other cooked beans such as kidney or cannellini beans.**

Fruits

- Chopped banana and strawberries.
- Large sticks of watermelon with seeds removed.
- Orange or mandarin segments with peel and pips removed.
- Canned fruits such as diced mixed fruit or peach slices.
- Grated or soft stewed apples or pears.
- Grapes or cherry tomatoes cut into halves.
- Stone fruit with skin and stone removed such as plums and nectarines.

Dairy

- Cheese cut into sticks, cubes or grated.

Introducing common allergy-causing foods

- Fish cakes made with **prawn or crab.**
- Hummus dip made with sesame with soft cooked vegetables.
Sandwiches with **smooth peanut butter.**

Drinks

- Babies can start learning to drink water from a cup at around 6 months.
- Offer cooled, boiled water in a cup at mealtimes and other times. From 12 months, you can offer fresh tap water without boiling it.
- From 12 months you can also offer full-cream cow's milk from a cup.
- Milks such as goat, sheep, coconut, almond or soy should not replace breast milk or infant formula in the first year. They can be used in cooking.
- Avoid fruit juice and soft drinks as these are high in sugar and can cause tooth decay. They should not be given to babies under 12 months, and limited for young children.
- Avoid teas, coffee, chocolate and soft drinks.

Encourage your child to develop healthy habits by offering water with meals and throughout the day. Avoid sugary drinks like juice and soft drinks, which can harm teeth and lead to poor nutrition.

Set a positive example by drinking plenty of water yourself—children learn best by watching you!

Pouches

It's best not to rely on foods in pouches for all your baby's meals. These are less nutritious than home-cooked meals. They also don't help baby learn to bite or chew or try new tastes and textures. Choose these sometimes when you can't offer a home-cooked meal. Put the food into a bowl so baby can practice feeding skills, rather than letting them suck from the pouch.

“Start healthy habits early—offer small sips of water with meals once your baby begins solids. It's a simple step toward lifelong hydration and well-being.”



Foods to Avoid

- Avoid or limit **processed foods**. These are high in fat, sugar and/or salt and not good for children. Foods that are examples of this are cakes, biscuits, chips, and ice cream.
- Avoid or limit **processed meats** such as ham, sausage and salami.
- Avoid **unpasteurized dairy products** such as “fresh from the farm”. These can contain harmful bacteria.
- Avoid **honey** until babies are 12 months old - there is a risk of botulism.

Safe Eating

- Always sit children down to eat. Do not give food or drink when they are playing, laughing or crying. Encourage children to eat slowly and chew well.
- Do not give hard foods to children under 4 as they can choke on things like popcorn, suckers, corn chips, and whole nuts. Nuts can be ground or offered as nut paste.
- Avoid chopped apples and carrots - grate or cook and mash first. Cut up round foods such as grapes and cherry tomatoes. Remove skins, bones, and pips from fruits.

Always stay with babies and young children while they eat. If your child is choking call 911 immediately, or get someone else to do it. The operator will stay on the line to assist you.

What About Allergies?

Around 1 in 10 babies has an allergic reaction to foods such as cow's milk, egg, wheat, fish, soy, peanut, tree nuts, sesame or shellfish. Research shows that introducing these foods in the first year can help reduce allergies. This is advised for all babies, even when a family member has a food allergy or the baby has eczema.

- Start by introducing a small amount (1/4 teaspoon) of one new food so you can see if it causes a reaction. For example, mix a little well-cooked egg or smooth peanut paste into mashed vegetables.
- If your baby does not have a reaction, it is important to keep offering this food regularly.
- Gradually increase the amount as they grow and eat more. If they haven't eaten the food for some time, they may develop an allergy. Keep breastfeeding if your and your baby want this.

Allergic reactions can include rashes, swelling of the lips, face, eyes or throat, going pale or floppy. If you have any concerns about allergies seek medical advice. Allergies should be diagnosed by a doctor.

Food Safety

- Always wash your hands before preparing foods.
- Use clean equipment.
- Animal foods, such as meat, chicken, fish and eggs should be well cooked.
- Fruits and vegetables should be thoroughly washed.
- Always use products before their use-by-date.
- If using pre-packaged or canned foods or food defrosted from the freezer, decide how much you will offer and spoon it into a small bowl. Store any extra in a clean, covered container in the fridge. Use it by the end of the next day.
- Never re-heat foods more than once.

Getting Help

Babies might have firmer or less frequent stools when starting solid foods. This usually sorts itself out in a few weeks. It can help to increase the amount of fiber they eat such as fruits, vegetables and oat-based baby cereal. If you have any concerns about feeding, constipation or your baby not accepting foods by 7-8 months, you can make an appointment with your baby's pediatrician, dietitian or other health professional.

Starting Solids is a Big and Exciting Step in Your Baby's Journey

It's not just about food—it's about learning, exploring, and building lifelong habits. By offering a variety of healthy meals and snacks from the five food groups, you're helping your baby get the nutrients they need to grow and thrive. Water is the best drink to support hydration, and introducing it early helps set a healthy example.

Remember, you decide what foods to offer, and your baby decides how much to eat. Their appetite will vary from day to day—this is completely normal. Trust your baby's cues, stay patient, and try to keep mealtimes relaxed and enjoyable.

This stage is about more than nutrition—it's about shared experiences, learning new tastes and textures, and creating positive food habits that will last a lifetime. Every small bite is a step toward a healthy future.

You're doing a great job—and every meal is an opportunity to nurture, connect, and grow.



