

FACTSHEET



This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professionals to make sure this information is right for your child. If you would like to provide feedback on this fact sheet, please visit: www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form.

Baby's first foods

The introduction of solid food is an important stage in your baby's development. It is an exciting time for you and your baby. Be guided by your baby – all children are different and progress at their own pace.

When to start

Until around **6 months of age**, your baby needs only breast milk or infant formula to grow and develop. Around 6 months your baby needs additional nutrients that food provides (particularly iron and zinc), as well as breast milk or formula.

Signs that your baby is ready for starting solids may include:

- Sitting upright when supported, with good control of the head
- Wanting to put things in his/her mouth
- Interest in food eaten by others
- Increased appetite, more frequent feeding

Learning to eat is a gradual process. It's all about discovering new tastes and textures, and learning how to swallow food. There is no need to force food - breast milk or formula is still the most important part of the baby's diet. At this stage solid foods are to give your baby different "tastes."

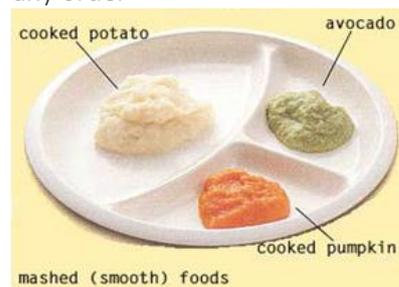
There can be problems when starting solids too early or too late. We recommend starting around 6 months (but not before 4 months). If you have any questions, please contact your health professional.

Key tips:

- Not too early (not before 4 months), not too late (start offering food by 6 months)
- Learning to eat takes practice
- Every baby is different

Around 6 months (not before 4 months)

- Offer food **between feeds or after** a feed
- Start by using a soft spoon or allow your baby to pick up soft foods
- Choose from a variety of different foods:
 - infant rice cereals, cooked quick oats or couscous
 - soft cooked meat, chicken, fish, egg or legumes
 - mashed or pureed fruit or vegetable such as apple, pear, banana, carrot, sweet potato, pumpkin, potato, zucchini
- Start with one to two teaspoons of food. Increase amount to suit appetite, and then build up to three meals a day at your baby's own pace
- Try one new food at a time, foods can be introduced in any order



Please note: picture demonstrates puree texture food, not necessarily recommended portion size

To help prevent food allergy, give your baby the common allergy causing foods before they turn one. These foods include: egg, fish, peanut, cow's milk, soy, tree nuts, wheat, shellfish and sesame.

If there is a history of allergy in your family please refer to ASCIA Infant Feeding Advice (www.allergy.org.au)

Notes:

- Always wash your hands before preparing food and use clean utensils. See 'Food Safety' factsheet for more information on how to prepare and store foods safely.
- Smile when offering new food, to make it pleasant and reassuring. Be gentle and don't rush.
- Offer water in a sippy cup from around 6 months.
- Use what you can from family meals rather than preparing separate meals, e.g. puree meats and vegetables
- Small quantities of food can be frozen in ice cube trays or stored in airtight plastic bags and thawed as needed.
- Commercial baby foods can be useful if you do not have enough time to prepare meals, however try not to over-rely on these because babies need variety.
- Many of these baby purees come in pouches. To help your baby's development, allow your baby to feed using a spoon instead of squeezing the pouch in to their mouth.

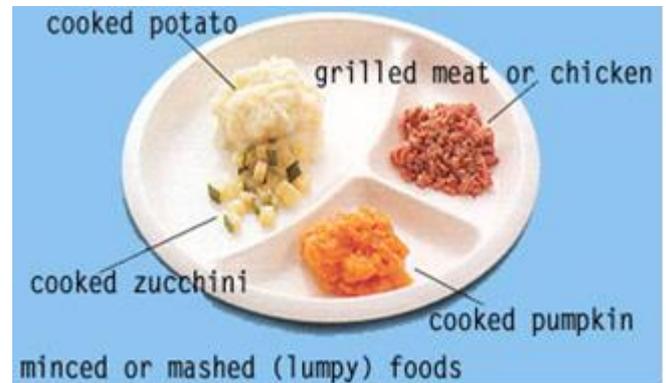
Key tips:

- Don't add solids to a bottle. Babies need to learn that there is a difference between eating and drinking.
- Don't add salt, sugar, honey or other sweet flavours to food or drink.
- If your baby spits out food, try again another day. It does not mean they do not like it.

From 7-8 months onwards

- At some stage between six to nine months of age, babies begin to chew (even if they have no teeth).
- They need to experience a wider range of textures such as minced meat, finger sized pieces of cooked vegetables, mashed, lumpy fruits and vegetables. This allows for practice in chewing and biting lumpy foods, and helps your baby develop the skill.
- If your baby is slow to take food, offer food before breast or bottle feed; or leave a bigger gap between feeds so that they are hungrier and eat better.
- Foods to try:
 - Well cooked meats and poultry e.g. minced or shredded meat, chicken, fish
 - Cooked egg

- Cooked, mashed legumes e.g. dried peas, lentils, baked beans, red kidney beans, chickpeas
- Couscous, pasta, bread/toast, rolled oats, baby muesli, rice



- Include at least 2-3 different foods at each meal. Aim to include a variety of colours and textures.
- You can offer some soft pieces of food they can feed themselves.
- Expect mess! Your baby will want to feel, squish, drop, shake food around. It's their way of learning about food. Some food will go in and be swallowed. Be prepared with plastic cloth, newspaper, old shower curtain under and around the highchair.
- Resist the urge to wipe the food off their face while they are eating. Allow them to concentrate on the food. Have a wet cloth ready to clean face and hands end of the meal or just put them in the bath.
- Babies love eating at the same time as others in the family and learn a lot from what they see. You can adapt the food your family is eating into manageable-sized pieces for your baby.
- Water is the best drink apart from breast milk or formula. Babies do not need juice or other drinks.
- Encourage your baby to drink from a cup rather than a bottle.

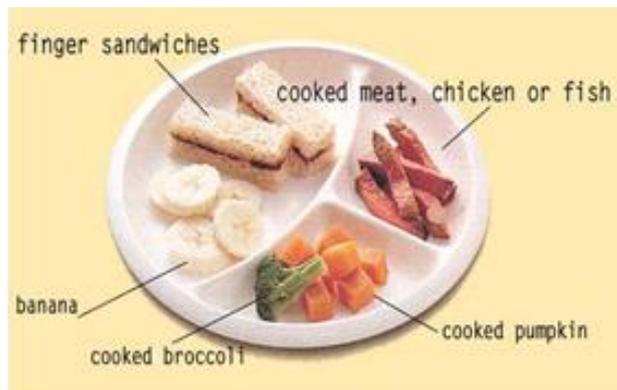
Finger Foods:

When your baby starts to pick things up with their hands, this is a good time to offer "finger foods" such as:

- Pieces of soft fruits and cooked vegetables such as banana, pear, peach, potato, carrot or pumpkin
- Toast or rusks
- Cooked pasta
- Thin strips of chicken or meat (these tend to be dry so you can dip in natural yoghurts or sauces)
- Grated cheese

Hint:

Preparing meals in bulk e.g. casseroles and freezing them in small containers can save time and stress when food is needed in a hurry. Remember to date and label the containers.



Parents sometimes worry their baby will choke if they are given lumpy, chunky foods.

- It is natural for parents to worry, but babies need to have more interesting textures and continue learning to eat as they grow. They need practice with lumpier, crunchy foods.
- **Gagging** and **choking** are often confused.
- Gagging is a normal reaction to having some food in the mouth which is difficult to swallow.
- The response of the person feeding the child makes a big difference to the way the baby reacts.
- Calm reassurance is what is needed, not a lot of fuss.
- **Choking** is when the airway to the lungs is blocked and a baby can't breathe or cry.
- It is important to know what to do before a problem arises.

The following website has a good factsheet on choking: <https://kidshealth.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/choking>

Key tips:

- Sit the baby upright and firmly supported, not slumped to one side.
- Always be with your baby when they are eating.
- Have them sit down and eat calmly – not playing around, running, jumping or laughing.
- Do not give foods that can break off into hard pieces e.g. chunks of raw carrot.
- Hard foods may be grated, cooked or mashed.
- Do not give whole nuts, hard lollies or other similar foods to young children

How do you know if your child has eaten enough?

It is important to trust your baby's appetite. Appetite varies from meal to meal and from day to day. If a child is

growing well, then they are eating enough for their own needs.

Your baby may have had enough if they:

- Turn their head or look away
- Push food out of their mouth
- Close their mouth when food is offered
- Shake their head (no)
- Slow their eating pace

What about cow's milk?

Breast milk or formula should be the major source of milk until one year of age. Cow's milk can be used in foods such as custard and cereal. Yoghurt and cheeses can also be used. Cow's milk can be introduced as a drink after 12 months.

From twelve months onwards

- After 12 months, cow's milk can be introduced as a drink. This can be offered in addition to breast feeding, and breast feeding can be continued for as long as desired by mum and baby. It is not necessary to continue formula beyond 12 months.
- Toddlers receive enough calcium from 400-500mls of full fat cow's milk. Giving more milk may fill them up, so they may eat less of other nutritious foods.
- Toddler milks and/or supplementary foods are not required for healthy children.
- Offer drinks (milk or water) from a cup. Continue to encourage your baby to feed him/herself.
- At this stage your child should be part of the family meal. Keep offering a wide variety of foods.

Essential ingredients for feeding:

- patience
- relaxed atmosphere
- bib and face washer for your baby
- sense of humour!

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