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## Introduction of solid foods to infants

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### Quick Facts

- Mother's milk or an iron-fortified formula supplies all the nutrients a baby needs during the first six months.
- An infant's developmental readiness should determine when to feed solid foods.
- Introduce single-ingredient foods one at a time at weekly intervals.
- Avoid sweetened foods because they can promote tooth decay and may cause a preference for sweets.



The introduction of semi-solid and solid foods to an infant's diet has changed from 1920, when these foods were seldom offered before 12 months. During the 1960s and 70s solid foods often were fed to infants in the first three months and viewed as a milestone achievement. Many people also believe that feeding solid foods (such as cereal) before 4 months of age will make an infant sleep through the night, which is not true.

Many health care professionals in the pediatric community were concerned that an early introduction of solid foods increases the risk of over-feeding and food allergies. An infant's developmental readiness should determine when to feed semi-solid foods. In fact, breast milk or iron-fortified formula supplies all the nutrition an infant needs in the first few months.

### When to Start

The child's age, appetite and growth rate are factors that help determine when to feed solid foods. Before feeding solid foods, the baby should have the ability to:

- swallow and digest solid foods,

- sit with support and have neck and head control, and
- close their lips over a spoon.

Semi-solid foods and juices are a significant change and should not be started until 4 to 6 months. This age usually coincides with the neuromuscular development necessary to eat solid foods.

Introduce single-ingredient foods one at a time at weekly intervals. This process helps identify any food sensitivities the child might have.

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The sequence of new foods is not critical, but rice cereal mixed with formula, breast milk or pasteurized whole milk is a good first choice. Adding vegetables, fruits, and meats to the infant's diet should be done one at a time. Serving mixed foods is not recommended in the beginning. (See chart.)

Food can be homemade or commercially prepared, depending on the mother's needs. Choose plain strained fruit such as applesauce, peaches or mashed ripe bananas. Do not offer fruit desserts that contain unnecessary sugar. They provide unneeded calories and may cause a preference for sweets as the child gets older. Introduce juices when your baby learns to drink from a cup, around 6 to 9 months. Dilute adult juices half and half with water or strain before giving to a baby. Sweet drinks can promote tooth decay and should be avoided.

### Remember

1. Begin with single-ingredient foods (such as rice cereal).
2. Wait five days between new foods.
3. Feed the baby when he or she is hungry, but do

not overfeed.

4. Make meal time a happy time.

### Starting Solids

- Offer new food when your baby is in a good mood, not too tired and not too hungry. Serve solids after the baby has had a little breast milk or formula.
- Hold the baby on your lap or use an infant seat or feeding chair if the baby can sit.
- Use a baby spoon and place a small amount (about ½ teaspoon) of food on the baby's tongue.
- Give the baby time to learn to swallow these foods and get used to the new tastes.
- Never use a bottle or other feeding device for semi-solid food.
- Do not feed baby directly from the jar; use a clean dish. Heat only the amount baby will eat and throw leftovers away.
- Make meal time fun for your infant.

### References

Colorado EFNEP 1990. *Only the best for your baby.*

Satter, Ellen, R.D. *Child of mine.* Kampmann and Co., Inc. 1983.

**Table 1: Calendar for feeding your baby for the first year of life.**

Foods	Birth	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12 Months
Breastmilk or iron-fortified formula	Breast milk or formula												Start whole cow's milk from cup.
Cereals and grain products					Iron-fortified plain infant cereal (no fruit flavor or mixed grains). Start with rice, then oatmeal or barley.			Teething biscuits.		Mixed grain cereals. Noodles, rice. Bread and toast strips.			
Vegetables							Strained, single vegetables			Cooked vegetables, mashed or chopped.			Sliced cooked vegetables for finger-feeding.
Fruit & fruit juices							Strained, single fruits.	Unsweetened fruit juices.		Cooked, canned, or soft fresh fruits, mashed or chopped.			Sliced soft fruit for finger feeding.
Meat and other protein foods							Strained single meats. Pureed dried beans, peas. Cottage cheese, mashed egg yolk. Creamy peanut butter, plain yogurt.			Same foods, chopped or mashed.			Same foods, bite-sized pieces for finger feeding.
Egg white and fish													Egg white. Tender, flaked boneless fish.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** Some foods may cause choking. Because of this, avoid raw carrots, nuts, seeds, raisins, grapes, popcorn and pieces of hot dogs during baby's first year.