

Introducing Your Infant to the Wonderful World of Food

When to start the first bite

0-6 months: Only give breast milk or formula

4-6 months: Some babies show interest in foods at this age and may be able to start with supplementary feedings

6 months: Look for signs of being ready to eat food

Signs of being ready for food

- Interest in foods others are eating
- Waking with hunger during the night, after previously being satisfied with 5-6 daytime human milk or formula feedings
- Tongue does not keep pushing food out of mouth, chews and swallows food well
- Strong head control and stability while sitting
- Good growth

How and when to introduce new foods (general guidelines)

6 months: Thin/liquid cereals

After 6 months: Strained or mashed vegetables and fruits

After 8-9 months: Well-chopped table foods, including meat and other protein sources

1st food to introduce (~6 months) is iron-fortified infant rice cereal

- Mix the cereal with breast milk, formula, or water that is lukewarm (about 1 tsp infant cereal to 4-5 tsp liquid)
- Do not put this mixture into a bottle, which can increase risk of overweight and cause your baby to miss the opportunity to develop eating skills
- Start by spoon-feeding your baby slowly, once per day, and stop offering the cereal when he or she seems to have had enough; begin to increase feedings as interest rises
- Once your infant is doing well with about ½ cup of rice cereal per day, offer new foods one at a time, spaced out by three days each, so that if he or she is allergic to a food the reaction will be evident and traceable

2nd foods to introduce are vegetables and fruits

- Strained or completely mashed
- Introduce one at a time (no more than 1 new food every 3 days)
- Try well-cooked, pureed vegetables like sweet potatoes, squash, green beans, or carrots, then later try avocado, applesauce, bananas, pears, or peaches



- Wait on tomatoes, strawberries, and citrus until closer to 1 year, when they are likely to be better tolerated

3rd foods to introduce (~8-9 months) are ground protein sources and appropriate finger-foods

- Quality proteins include meat, poultry, and cheese/yogurt
- It may be helpful to wait to introduce eggs, fish, nuts and peanut butter until after one year of age to minimize the risk of an allergic response, especially if allergies run in the family
- By this stage, foods do not need to be pureed; they can be soft and mashed with a fork. Children will usually enjoy playing with food and are becoming interested in self-feeding, which is an important developmental skill to be encouraged. Using a spoon might get messy, but it is a good step for the baby who is ready to try it; finger foods can be a simple way to begin
- Soft and small chunks of whole-wheat bread can be used for self-feeding practice

Other feeding notes

- Make sure that all foods are cooled down, well mashed, and unseasoned
- Do not add any salt, sugar, or other condiments to foods until at least 12-24 months: the simpler the better
- Do not offer any sweetened foods or drinks to prevent creating a taste for sweets, since a preference for dessert is easily acquired and a "sweet tooth" can be difficult to overcome

Feeding Precautions

- Do not give infants honey or any foods containing it due to risk of botulism toxicity
- Do not save the left-overs of a jar that has been double-dipped into. First scoop out a portion of food onto a plate and feed from there to minimize waste while keeping food safe from bacteria
- Make sure that when baby advances from purees to soft foods that they are all finely chopped or mashed to minimize risk of choking. Potentially dangerous foods to watch out for include sausage, hot dogs, nuts, grapes, raisins, beans, apple pieces, popcorn, round candy, hard chunks of cheese and uncooked vegetables (especially carrots) – avoid foods that are not able to be finely diced

