

Helpful Hints for Feeding your Baby

Feeding your baby is one of the most important and time-consuming activities in your baby's life. Since it does take so much time, it should be a time of great joy and happiness in the life of both you and your child. This is not always so easy to accomplish. Everyone (friends, family, people in the checkout line at Publix) will want to share advice on the subject, particularly on when to introduce solid foods.

Here are some basic facts:

1. Most babies receive all the calories and nutrients they need from breast milk or formula for the first 4 to 6 months of age. Therefore, it is not necessary to be in a hurry to begin other baby foods.
2. Solid food does not fill you child more than breast or bottle feeding and therefore, does not make babies sleep better.
3. The early introduction of solids may be associated with food allergies and childhood obesity.

Obviously, babies can't feed exclusively on breast milk or formula for life, and there are reasons, both social and developmental, that require gradual introduction of solid food. It is important to wait until your baby is ready. There are signs that indicate this readiness:

1. Baby weighs at least 13 pounds and has doubled birth weight.
2. Baby is hungry after 8 to 10 feedings or drinks more than 40 ounces of formula a day. Few babies will eat effectively if not hungry.
3. Baby sits with support, has control of head and body movements, and begins to chew on things and ceases to suck on them. Chewing is a motor skill and is essential for eating solid foods.
4. Baby begins to show interest in solid foods. Your child begins to watch you and others as you eat.

Remember that you are about to teach your child a new activity. The teaching-learning process of eating will have ups and downs, successes and failures. It will require patience and time and hopefully prove to be a truly happy process in the life of your child.

Some tips when getting started:

1. Babies should continue to receive the majority of their calories and all their fat from breast milk or formula for the first year of life. Offer solids when babies are hungry enough to be interested but not so hungry they are frantic.
2. The bottle should contain only fluids (milk, juice, water, etc.). Any other food should be fed to your baby with a spoon. This teaches your little one to use his/her mouth and tongue correctly.
3. Babies should sit up in a chair or be held in someone's arms to take a bottle. Propping bottles or giving a bottle to take to bed may cause tooth decay or ear problems.
4. Feed solids with a spoon, preferably from a bowl, not the jar, and discard leftovers.
5. Avoid overfeeding. Stop feeding when baby turns away or shows disinterest.
6. Babies do not really need juice. But if you want to give it, start with diluted white grape juice then add different varieties as needed.
7. Avoid feeding children solids directly before bedtime. This often creates a habit of needing to eat in order to sleep and should be avoided.
8. Don't use cow's milk as a replacement for breast milk or formula during baby's first year. After the first birthday, substitute whole cow's milk. Do not use 2%, low-fat, or skim milk until baby is at least two years old. If baby is on soy formula, check with your doctor before introducing dairy products.
9. There is no need to add sugar or salt to your baby's food – they will eat the food without them.
10. The symptoms of food allergy are stomach aches, diarrhea, vomiting, coughing, wheezing, rash and/or irritability. If these are occurring, discontinue the last introduced food.

First Food --- Baby Cereal

1. Somewhere between 4 to 6 months, introduce rice cereal first followed by barley and oatmeal cereal. Rice cereal can be very constipating so consider switching to oatmeal or barley cereals if problems occur.
2. If there is a history of food allergies in your family, delay introducing wheat cereal until your baby is at least one year old.
3. Use plain iron-fortified dry cereals. They are higher in nutrition and less expensive than cereal-fruit combinations. It is also easier to trace the possible source of a food allergy if you use a plain cereal.
4. Begin with 1 tablespoon of dry cereal, thinned with 1 ounce of formula, breast milk or water. Keep in mind that some babies prefer their cereal like paste and some like it like a soup. Experiment to figure out what thickness your baby prefers. If they refuse cereal moistened as above, try a little white grape juice.
5. Once baby has adapted to the spoon, start a breakfast-dinner schedule.

Second Food—Stage One Vegetables

1. Begin vegetables when baby is eating 3 tablespoons of cereal at a seating or about 2 weeks after starting with cereal.
2. Vegetables can be mixed with or offered separately with the dinner cereal.
3. Start with the orange vegetables (squash, sweet potatoes, carrots) and then follow with the green vegetables. Starting with vegetables will hopefully reduce the “sweet tooth” response to fruits first.
4. Remember to introduce only one new food at a time to your baby’s diet. Wait about three days after starting one new food before starting another. This is so you can tell which food a baby may not tolerate well.

Third Food –Stage One Fruits

1. Introduce after vegetables are well tolerated.
2. Fruits are usually mixed with cereal at the breakfast feeding to start, then may be used to supplement other feedings.
3. Mashed banana, unsweetened applesauce, strained pureed pears and peaches are good first fruits.
4. Remember to introduce one fruit every 3 to 4 days and watch carefully for any signs of allergic reaction.

Fourth Food – Stage Two “Mixed Meats and Other Mixed Foods”

1. Start between 7 and 9 months.
2. Start with chicken or turkey that has been mixed with another ingredient you know that your baby can tolerate, like “chicken and apples” or “turkey and carrots.” Then move on to beef and lamb. You may also serve fish but make sure that there are no bones by rubbing the pieces between your fingers before you offer it to your baby.
3. Avoid mixtures of foods (mixed cereals, “dinners”, mixed vegetables, etc.) until you know that baby can tolerate each ingredient individually. Read the labels.

Foods to Avoid Until Age 1 Year

HONEY has been reported to have caused botulism in babies under one year. We recommend avoiding it.

EGG WHITES are highly allergic for some babies and can produce snotty noses and belly aches. Egg yolks are fine after 9 months, but avoid the white until your baby’s birthday.

CHOCOLATE is associated with rashes, vomiting and diarrhea in some babies. We recommend avoiding it for the first years. They have a lifetime to enjoy it!

SHELLED VEGETABLES such as corn and beans may be difficult to digest and can produce diarrhea.

CITRUS AND OTHER ACIDIC FRUITS AND JUICES such as oranges, lemons, limes, grapefruits, strawberries, pineapples and tomatoes or their juices often cause diaper rashes from skin being exposed to acidic urine. They can also cause vomiting, diarrhea and belly aches in some babies.

HOT DOGS are a leading cause of choking in infants and should be avoided.

FISH that could have bones poses a choking hazard. Fish sticks and tuna fish (in moderation) are fine.

Foods to Avoid Until Age 18 months

SHELLFISH, such as shrimp and clams, should be avoided for allergy reasons.

PEANUT BUTTER and other nuts are also an allergy food for babies and frequently produce skin rashes.