

# Do's and Don'ts for Baby's First Foods

Reviewed by Taylor Wolfram, MS, RDN, LDN

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Breast-feeding has been shown to improve infant, child and maternal health outcomes and help control healthcare costs, but how long should breast-feeding last and when should parents introduce solid foods, also known as complementary foods?

Multiple health-focused organizations, including the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and the World Health Organization, recommend exclusive breast-feeding, meaning the infant receives only breast milk, for the first six months of life to provide optimal nutrition and health benefits. Whether your baby is breast-fed or formula-fed, solid foods may be introduced starting at 6 months of age.

Once solid foods are introduced, health professionals recommend continuing breast-feeding through 12 months of age and, after that, as desired by mother and baby. Introducing your baby to solid foods is an exciting milestone your little one is sure to enjoy. When you start introducing children to the world of solid foods, you are helping them shape food and feeding habits while establishing healthy eating patterns.

**[Not sure how to get your baby started on solid foods? These tips will help.](#)** 

## **Weaning From Breast-Feeding**

When you choose to wean your baby, introduce either infant formula or cow's milk, depending on your baby's age. If your baby is under 12 months of age, wean from breast milk to iron-fortified infant formula. If your baby is 12 months or older, whole cow milk is appropriate.

When deciding if you should wean your baby to a bottle or a cup, consider the developmental readiness. Between 4 and 6 months, most infants will drink or suck small amounts of liquid from a cup or a glass when someone else holds it. Older babies and toddlers usually have the coordination to drink fluids from a cup or a straw. However, for infants under 6 months of age, a bottle is the best choice.

## Is Your Baby Ready?

Check with your pediatrician before starting solid foods. Most people in the medical community agree the best time to start your baby on solid foods is around 6 months old. Signs a baby may be ready to start solid foods include sitting up with minimal support, demonstrating good head control, reaching for food off other family members' plates, or refusing a bottle or breast by turning away.

The order in which foods are introduced doesn't matter for most babies. Traditionally, iron-fortified baby cereals with breast milk or formula are given first followed by vegetables, fruits and meats. However, if your baby has been primarily breast-fed, puréed meat or poultry may be a good first food to introduce as they provide more easily absorbable iron and zinc than plant foods. Either way, foods should be puréed to avoid choking, and infant cereals and other solids should never be put into a baby's bottle.

## Getting Started With Solids

Current evidence does not indicate needing to wait beyond 4 to 6 months before introducing potentially allergy-causing foods such as eggs, dairy, soy, peanuts and fish. In fact, introducing peanut-containing foods as early as 4 to 6 months of age can help prevent a peanut allergy.

Begin by offering a few spoonfuls each day, and introducing one new food at a time, every several days, to monitor for allergic reactions such as diarrhea, rash or vomiting, before moving on to a new food. Parents with food allergies should discuss concerns with their pediatrician. As foods are tolerated, continue to expose your baby to a variety of foods. Some children may need multiple exposures to a new taste before enjoying it.

Textures are very important for introducing foods. Most babies prefer to start with softer, smoother textures and gradually move toward thicker foods.

## Start Solid Foods Safely

Hold your baby upright on your lap and have your baby sit up straight and face forward when you first introduce solid foods. This makes swallowing easier and choking less likely. Then move your baby to a safe high chair.

Talk in a quiet, encouraging voice while you feed. There's no need to be entertaining. Babies easily are overwhelmed and distracted with games.

Never feed your baby solid foods from a bottle. It can be a choking hazard, cause a delay in learning feeding skills and it may encourage your baby to eat too much. And despite a popular misconception, putting cereal in a baby's bottle won't help with sleeping through the night.

Always spoon-feed from a bowl, not from the jar of food unless your baby will finish it during that feeding. Feeding directly from the jar may introduce bacteria from your baby's mouth to the spoon and back into the food, creating a food safety issue. If your baby is still hungry, use a clean spoon to take more food from the jar.

## Examples of appropriate complementary foods listed by age:

6 months:

- Ground, cooked, single-grain cereal or infant cereal with breast milk or formula
- Mashed banana, avocado or cooked beans

- Cooked and pureed carrots, peas or sweet potato
- Cooked and pureed meat or poultry
- Peanut butter pureed with water

9 months:

- Sliced and quartered bananas or small pieces of other soft fruits
- A variety of cooked vegetables cut into small pieces, such as squash and green beans
- Whole cooked beans
- Well-cooked, minced or finely chopped meat, poultry or fish

12 months:

- Small pieces of fruit
- Small pieces of cooked vegetables
- Soft, shredded meat, poultry or fish
- Mixed food dishes the family is eating in appropriately sized pieces

4 years:

- Popcorn and whole kernel corn
- Nuts and seeds
- Whole grapes, cherry tomatoes
- Olives
- Hot dogs
- Hard, raw fruits or vegetables such as apples, celery and carrots
- Chunks of meat, poultry and cheese
- Sticky foods, such as peanut butter, which can get stuck in the back of the mouth
- Hard candy, gum drops and jelly beans

*For toddlers and preschoolers, chop grapes, meat, poultry, hot dogs and raw vegetables and fruits into small pieces (about ½ inch or smaller).*

## **Nurturing Healthy Relationships with Food**

Establishing a positive feeding relationship during infancy can have lifetime benefits. Keep in mind that children are responsible for how much and whether they eat so always wait for your baby to pay attention to each spoonful before you feed it. Don't be afraid to let your baby touch the food in the dish and on the spoon. You wouldn't want to eat something if you didn't know anything about it, would you? In addition, know the cues that your baby is done eating. A common cue babies are full is heading turning.

Whatever happens, don't get discouraged and enjoy the experience. With a little patience and creativity, you can make your baby's first solid food eating experience fun for everyone involved!

*Reviewed November 2017*

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