

# Introducing Solid Foods

McKenzie Pediatrics

## How Do I Tell Whether My Baby Is Ready For Solid Foods?

The majority of infants are developmentally ready to begin solid feedings by 4 to 6 months of age. Picking the right time to introduce solids is very important. A baby is ready if:

- She is taking more than 32 ounces of formula per 24 hours, or is still nursing more than 6 times per 24 hours
- She can sit with support with continual steady head and neck control. This milestone is seldom achieved before 4 months of age
- Her tongue thrust reflex has disappeared. This reflex is an inborn mechanism that protects babies from choking on foreign objects. If you offer cereal and your baby repeatedly thrusts her tongue, she is not ready for solids.
- She is showing interest in her parents' table food, by reaching out to grab your food or utensil, or getting excited watching your every bite.

## What If I Start Giving My Baby Solid Feedings Before She Is Ready?

Your mother or grandmother may tell you that they started their children on solid feedings well before four months of age, and that "they did just fine." For the most part, they are right. But introducing solid feedings too early increases the risk of a baby choking and aspirating food into its lungs, which increases the risk of serious illness or even death. Introducing solid foods too early also increases the chance that you and your baby will become quickly frustrated by the feeding process, and this might set the stage for future mealtime hassles.

## What If I Decide To Wait Until My Baby Is Older To Start Solid Feedings?

Waiting too long, past 8 months of age, to introduce solid feedings might lead to difficulties. Older babies often resist being taught the new tricks of chewing and swallowing solids, since they are too long accustomed to the ease of obtaining their nutrition from the bottle or breast. They might also be less adventurous in trying new tastes the older they are.

## What Foods Do I Start With?

It doesn't matter a great deal exactly which foods you start with, but a few general principles should be followed:

- Cereal should be given in the morning. Cereals are great fiber sources, and fiber is best for the body if given earlier in the day.
- Babies may prefer one type of cereal over another. Any baby cereal may be tried. If your baby dislikes one, try another. Cereals can be mixed with water, formula, expressed breast milk, or, later on, jar fruit (applesauce, pears...). Typically, by 6 months of age most babies are eating 3-4 tablespoons of cereal for breakfast daily.

- Do not introduce any more than 1 new food every 48 hours. Most, but not all, signs of a food intolerance or allergy will appear within 48 hours of trying a new food. Such signs include: sudden unexplained fussiness, unexplained rash, or sudden diarrhea (especially if blood is present within the stools).
- Once the morning cereal feedings have been well accepted and tolerated for more than 4 days, you may introduce an evening feeding of jar vegetables. Vegetables are best introduced first, before fruits, as babies who begin with fruits often have more difficulty accepting the less-sweet vegetables. Once most or all of the usual baby jar vegetables have been introduced, only then should you introduce jar fruit, after they've eaten their vegetable. Typically, by 6 months babies are eating one-half to one jar of both a vegetable and a fruit for dinner.
- Most babies by 6 months are eating solid feedings twice daily. Most babies aren't interested in a "lunchtime" feeding until 7- to 10-months. Most babies at 6 months are still taking just the same amount of formula or breast milk as they did at 4 months, before they started solid feedings. You won't notice a baby's milk intake begin to decrease until they begin eating greater quantities of foods with more fats and proteins, usually by 7- to 8-months.
- Certain foods are to be avoided until your baby is much older: honey (straight from the jar), raisins, grapes, hot dog slices, nuts, raw vegetables, raw apples, popcorn, shellfish, and peanut butter are some examples.
- Many "Stage 2" jar baby foods are simply the same as "Stage 1" foods, especially if they are single-item foods. You might find it more economical to buy Stage 2 jars of favorite single-item foods for your baby. Just take care to avoid foods with chunks until at least 7 months of age.
- Remember, there are lots of wonderful self-help books on how to prepare baby foods on your own. It can be cheaper and healthier to do so, if time allows. Many parents have successfully raised their children never having given them commercially-prepared jar baby foods.
- Remember to try later a food that has been rejected once already. Babies' tastes evolve, and a food he dislikes now may become a favorite later on.
- And remember not to apply your tastes to your baby. Just because you dislike a certain fruit or vegetable does not mean he will as well.

Beginning solid feedings can be a complex and sometimes frustrating experience, but one that can be a lot of fun if done patiently and correctly. Remember that early on there are absolutely no maximum or minimum amounts of solid foods your baby has to have each day. She is still getting all of her nutritional needs met from her breast milk or formula. So stay relaxed, don't worry if you miss a meal, and don't worry about overfeeding...your baby will let you know when she is full!

