

First Solid Foods!

Introducing solid food to your child is an exciting time! Knowing when, how and what to introduce solids can help optimizing your child's health over the long term, affecting body composition, gut health, immune system function, even their emotional relationship with food.

Breast milk is the ideal food for babies for the first six months. At some point between four and six months, your baby will show signs of interest in and readiness for solid food; introducing solids during this 4-6 month window may reduce his risk of food allergies. Consider introducing solid food when your child:

- shows interest in others eating food (ideally, include your baby during meal times right from the beginning to model and set a standard of healthy family meals, which have many benefits)
- sits confidently with some support, and has strong head and neck control
- stops reflexively pushing substances out of his mouth with his tongue

There is no “right” way to introduce solids, nor is there a “right” first food. Some principles:

- your baby's iron stores (and mom's breastmilk) are depleted by about six months, so iron-rich foods are important; strained meats are a good example, and could easily be baby's first food; processed iron-fortified cereals aren't ideal, as they can be constipating (ask me for resources on other iron-rich foods)
- higher-allergenic foods such as egg whites, peanuts and tree nuts, gluten and dairy can (and perhaps *should*) be introduced in this 4-6 month window; if your child already has allergic tendencies, let's discuss further; **honey should not be introduced until 12 months**
- babies have an inherent sweet tooth (have you ever tasted breastmilk?!); while it is not recommended to add extra sugar (or salt) to foods, naturally sweet foods like fruits are great
- first foods should be very soft, and easily squished between two fingers; always supervise baby!
- prepared “baby foods” are more expensive, create waste, and are less nutritionally-dense
- babies can eat the same deconstructed whole foods that the rest of the family consumes
- spoon-feeding isn't necessary ... part of the learning experience is touching, smelling, and playing with her food ... hand your child a spoon and get used to a mess! This also helps to develop her ability to recognize her hunger and satiety cues, critical for self-regulation; it is important to honour her cues when she indicates she is done - no need to convince or coerce!
- babies (and toddlers) are naturally *neophobic*; it can take 10-15 offerings of a new food before a child accepts it ... and they may *never* develop a love of kale ...
- a good guideline is that it's the parent's job to decide *what* goes on the table (ie. a variety of healthy options); it's the child's job to decide *which* of the options and *how much* to consume - and this may change a lot over time!
- try offering solids once per day before breastfeeding, when your child is not desperately hungry; at first consider it play - don't worry if it doesn't seem like your child has consumed very much; until your child is 12 months old, breastmilk continues to be the primary source of nutrition
- as your child gets used to solids, offer more variety, and more frequently

○ as your child approaches 12 months old, her diet should evolve into including the same healthy whole foods that the rest of the family eats, with 3 meals, and 2-3 or three healthy snacks per day; the quantity per meal will vary with her growth rate and activity level

● water should be introduced when solids are; sippy cups or bottles aren't necessary - offer water in a cup and help your child learn to hold and drink from it; please do not introduce juice, even 100%, or milk; herbal teas are fine - please discuss with me

Things to note:

● solid foods will change the consistency and odour of your child's stool; the change in consistency may make them uncomfortable at first; if you become concerned about the frequency of bowel movements, or discomfort, please check in with me

● most babies will not have intolerances to healthy first foods; if you notice any concerning change in skin or behaviour, please check in with me

First food suggestions (consider this a possible progression):

● raw, fork-mashed avocado or banana

● apple, pear, peach, carrot, broccoli, spinach, sweet potato - steamed until fork mashable

● homemade cereal - grind whole oats, brown rice, barley, etc. in a food processor; boil 1 cup water and add ¼-½ cup ground grains; simmer until all absorbed (play with the proportions to find the ideal consistency) ... you can add smooth nut butters, mashed fruits, etc. to this over time

● chicken, beef, turkey or fish (wild, free-range, grass fed, etc.) - thoroughly cooked, and pureed

● tofu (GMO free, organic)

● thoroughly cooked and mashed legumes (lentils, beans, etc.) - ideally cooked from dry, as opposed to from a can

● whole eggs, boiled and smashed, or scrambled (consider adding cooked greens)

● full fat cheese or yogurt (no sugar, please!)

As your child expands his repertoire, start adding new foods to previously accepted ones to create more complex meals and snacks - again, assuming your family is eating a wide variety of healthy, whole foods, baby can eat what you're having, in a more developmentally-appropriate form!

Some resources:

● <http://wholesomebabyfood.momtastic.com/>

● <https://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Articles/Breastfeeding-Infant-feeding/Introducing-solid-food-to-your-baby.aspx>

Have fun!!