



Cheryl E. Perkins, MD, FAAP

Austin Whitlock, III, MD, FAAP

Feeding instructions for healthy babies born at or near full term:

Babies should receive only breast milk or infant formula exclusively for the first 5 months of life unless the doctor tells you otherwise (for example, if your baby is sick she may need to drink Pedialyte just for a few hours). Breast fed infants need to be supplemented with vitamin D for the first 4 months of life. After 4 months of age, babies that are exclusively breastfed need iron in addition to vitamin D supplementation (e.g. Polyvisol with iron is a liquid vitamin for infants that provides both vitamin D and iron). Formula fed infants, in general, do not require vitamins.

Is my baby ready for baby food?

- **Can he hold his head up?** Your baby should be able to sit in a high chair, a feeding seat, or an infant seat with good head control.
- **Does he open his mouth when food comes his way?** Babies may be ready if they watch you eating, reach for your food, and seem eager to be fed.
- **Can he move food from a spoon into his throat?** If you offer a spoon of rice cereal, he pushes it out of his mouth, and it dribbles onto his chin, he may not have the ability to move it to the back of his mouth to swallow it. That's normal. Remember, he's never had anything thicker than breast milk or formula before, and this may take some getting used to. Try diluting it the first few times; then, gradually thicken the texture. You may also want to wait a week or two and try again.

Usually around 5 months of age, stage 1 (pureed) meats may be introduced. Start with half a spoonful or less and talk to your baby through the process ("*Mmm, see how good this is?*"). Your baby may not know what to do at first. She may look confused, wrinkle her nose, roll the food around inside her mouth, or reject it altogether. One way to make eating solids for the first time easier is to give your baby a little breast milk, formula, or both first; then switch to very small half-spoonfuls of food; and finish with more breast milk or formula. This will prevent your baby from getting frustrated when she is very hungry.

Do not be surprised if most of the first few solid-food feedings wind up on your baby's face, hands, and bib. Increase the amount of food gradually, with just a teaspoonful or two to start. This allows your baby time to learn how to swallow solids.

Do not make your baby eat if she cries or turns away when you feed her. Go back to breastfeeding or bottle-feeding exclusively for a time before trying again. Remember that starting solid foods is a gradual process; at first, your baby will still be getting most of her nutrition from breast milk, formula, or both. Also, each baby is different, so readiness to start solid foods will vary.

Never give more than 1 new food every 3 days. That way, if your baby has a reaction to a food, we'll know exactly which food caused it. When a baby is getting a new food it can also eat all of the other foods it has had before in the past and not had a reaction to.

Which foods should I start with? While there is no scientific consensus on which food to begin with, meats are high in iron, zinc, and protein. All three of those nutrients are vitally important for proper growth in an infant and therefore a good choice to start with.

After meats, which foods do I give? In order to reduce your infant's risk of developing food allergy, after you have introduced at least 2 different meats and if your baby **does NOT have severe persistent eczema**, you should introduce peanuts to your infant. How are peanuts introduced to your baby? Whole peanuts themselves are choking hazards and should not be fed to babies. They can block the air passages, and if whole or partially chewed peanuts are inhaled into the lungs, they can cause a severe and possibly fatal chemical pneumonia. Avoid whole peanuts until your child is old enough to be counted on to chew them well (usually at least 4 years and up).

- A good way to introduce peanut in infancy would be mixing and thinning-out a small amount of peanut butter in cereal or yogurt. Dissolving peanut butter puffs with breast milk or formula and feeding it by spoon is another good option.

If your baby has or had severe, persistent eczema or an immediate allergic reaction to any food— especially if it is a highly allergenic food such as egg—he or she is considered "high risk for peanut allergy." You should talk to your child's pediatrician first to best determine how and when to introduce the highly allergenic complementary foods. If you are unsure how severe your infant's eczema is, ask your doctor. Ideally peanut-containing products should be introduced to these babies as early as 4 to 6 months. It is strongly advised that these babies have an allergy evaluation or allergy testing prior to trying any peanut-containing product. Your doctor may also require the introduction of peanuts be in a supervised setting (e.g., in the doctor's office).

What next? Eggs are also a good choice for baby food. The general progression I suggest is meats, peanuts, eggs, vegetables, fruits and lastly cereals (like rice, oatmeal and barley). Cereals are largely unnecessary because many of the nutrients provided by cereals are in better food choices. Also, cereals have a lot of carbohydrates in them, which can be bad for our metabolism. However, cereals aren't harmful as long as they are given in moderation.

When can I give my baby finger foods?

Once your baby can sit up and bring her hands or other objects to her mouth, you can give her finger foods to help her learn to feed herself. To prevent choking make sure anything you give your baby is soft, easy to swallow, and cut into small mashable pieces. Some examples include small pieces of banana, wafer-type cookies, or crackers; scrambled eggs; well-cooked pasta; well-cooked, finely chopped chicken; and well-cooked, cut-up potatoes or peas.

At each of your baby's daily meals, she should be eating about 4 ounces, or the amount in one small jar of strained baby food. Limit giving your baby processed foods that are made for adults and older children. These foods often contain more salt and other preservatives.

If you want to give your baby fresh food, use a blender or food processor, or just mash softer foods with a fork. All fresh foods should be cooked with no added salt or seasoning. Although you can feed your baby raw bananas (mashed), most other fruits and vegetables should be cooked until they are soft. Refrigerate any food you do not use, and look for any signs of spoilage before giving it to your baby. Fresh foods are not bacteria-free, so they will spoil more quickly than food from a can or jar.

NOTE: Do not give your baby any food that requires chewing at this age. Do not give your baby any food that can be a choking hazard, including hot dogs (including meat sticks, or baby food "hot dogs"); nuts and seeds; chunks of meat or cheese; whole grapes; popcorn; chunks of peanut butter; raw vegetables; fruit chunks, such as apple chunks; and hard, gooey, or sticky candy.

What changes can I expect after my baby starts solids?

When your baby starts eating solid foods, his stools will become more solid and variable in color. Because of the added sugars and fats, they will have a much stronger odor too. Peas and other green vegetables may turn the stool a deep-green color; beets may make it red. (Beets sometimes make urine red as well.) If your baby's meals are not strained, his stools may contain undigested pieces of food, especially hulls of peas or corn, and the skin of tomatoes or other vegetables. All of this is normal. Your baby's digestive system is still immature and needs time before it can fully process these new foods. If the stools are extremely loose, watery, or full of mucus, however, it may mean the digestive tract is irritated. In this case, reduce the amount of solids and introduce them more slowly. If the stools continue to be loose, watery, or full of mucus, consult your child's doctor to find the reason.

Should I give my baby juice or water?

Babies do not need juice. Babies younger than 12 months should not be given juice. After 12 months of age (up to 3 years of age), give only 100% fruit juice and no more than 4 ounces a day. Offer it only in a cup, not in a bottle. To help prevent tooth decay do not put your child to bed with a bottle. Juice reduces the appetite for other, more nutritious, foods. Too much juice can also cause diaper rash, diarrhea, or excessive weight gain. What about water? Healthy babies do not need extra water. Breast milk, formula, or both provide all the fluids they need. However, with the introduction of solid foods, water can be added to your baby's diet. Also, a small amount of water (2 - 4 oz maximum) may be needed in very hot weather. If you live in an area where the water is fluoridated, then drinking water will also help prevent future tooth decay.