

Healthy Habits Start Early: Tips for Introducing Solid Foods

Starting solid foods is an important part of your baby's development. Use these tips to start solid foods off right — and set your baby on the road to healthy eating for life!



Is your baby ready?

Most babies are ready for solids at around 6 months. Look for these signs:

- He can sit up mostly on his own
- He can hold his head up for a long time
- He's interested in mealtime — for example, he might try to grab food off your plate
- He continues to be hungry between nursing or bottle feeding
- He doesn't automatically push food out of his mouth with his tongue (young babies have a "tongue-thrust reflex" that fades as they get older)



Why is it important to wait until your baby is ready?

Starting solid foods too early makes it more likely that your child will have a hard time staying at a healthy weight.

Keep giving your baby breast milk or formula.

It's important to know that for the first year of life your baby will still get most of her nutrition from breast milk or formula — even after she starts eating solid foods.



Choose healthy drinks.

- If you want to give your baby something to drink during meals with solid foods, offer water.
- Sugary drinks (even 100% juice!) add unneeded calories and can harm your baby's teeth.
- Keep cereal out of the bottle (unless otherwise directed by a physician) — it adds unneeded calories to your baby's diet.



Offer simple foods made for babies.

Cereals for babies and jarred baby food are both good options.



Watch for signs that your baby is done eating.

If your baby turns his head away from food or keeps his lips shut, he's done eating. Don't force him to eat more — when he starts solids, your baby is developing important eating skills, including understanding and trusting his own hunger and fullness cues.



Give fruits and veggies at every meal — and snack time, too.

Babies form their taste patterns by 9 months old. So when your baby starts to feed herself finger foods like cereal and crackers, make sure she keeps eating fruits and veggies.

Get your family and child care providers on board.

You know your baby better than anyone — and you can tell when he's hungry or full. Make sure your baby's caregivers also know his hunger and fullness cues so they won't overfeed him.



Introduce a variety of solid foods to avoid picky eating later on.

Let your baby try a bunch of different colors, flavors and textures. Babies who eat a variety of foods are less likely to be picky eaters — and they may get more nutrients, too.

Stick with it.

It can take as many as 10 to 15 tries over several months for a child to get used to a new flavor. Remember, you only need to offer a spoonful or two each time, not a whole bowl. Keep trying — it's worth it!



It takes time and practice for children to learn to eat solid foods. Your warmth and patience through this process will help set your child up for healthy growth and development.

For more information, visit www.healthychildren.org/growinghealthy.

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