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.

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

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

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