

Solid Foods Introduction

by Angela D'Alessandro, D.O., F.A.A.P.

Q: A common question we receive as pediatricians, “is how and when to start solid foods in infancy?”

A: The best time to start this process is between four and six months of age, when your baby can sit with some support and move his head to participate in the feeding process. This is also about the time that the “tongue-push” reflex dissipates, allowing babies to be more successful eating from a spoon. Research has shown that, in most cases, introducing solids foods earlier than four months will not help your baby sleep through the night. Also, studies show that starting solid foods prior to four months of age can increase your infant’s risk of food allergies and obesity.

Q: What type of solid food should parents try first?

A: Cereals are usually our “first foods.” Starting with rice cereal is a good idea, as it is less likely to cause allergies than other cereals. Oatmeal and barley cereals may be tried two to three weeks later. Strained or pureed vegetables and fruits are the next foods added to your baby’s diet. The order in which you add veggies and fruits is not important. However, baby’s love “sweet” foods, so we usually recommend starting with vegetables first (i.e. they don’t always want their carrots and peas if they’ve already had peaches and pears!). Remember no more than one new food every few days and no more than three new foods per week.

Q: Are there any foods parents should avoid introducing during infancy?

A: If parents do not have food allergies it is OK after about six months of age to start pureed or softened fish and eggs, according to the American Academy of Allergy and Immunology. Foods like avocado, mango and strawberries are also OK after this time. A good rule of thumb is to start with the basics (sweet potatoes, carrots, peaches, etc.) but be sure to present your infant with a variety of foods. Honey should be avoided in the first year of life as well as tough to chew foods that could be a choking hazard (peanuts, raisins, grapes, hot dogs, raw carrots, candy, popcorn, etc.).

Q: I am familiar with how much milk to give my children, but what is the appropriate amount of solid foods?

A: Solid food feeding volume should be about two to four tablespoons (one to two ounces) of each kind of food per meal. If your child is still hungry, feed her more. Finger foods are small, bite size pieces of soft food. They can be started between nine and ten months of age, or whenever your baby develops a pincer grasp. Good finger foods are dry cereals (Cheerios, Rice Krispies, etc.), slices of cheese, pieces of scrambled eggs, slices of canned fruits (peaches, pears or pineapple), slices of soft fresh fruits (especially bananas), crackers, cookies and breads. Once your baby is up to three meals per day, he may need a small snack to tide him over between meals.

The mid-morning or mid-afternoon snack should be a nutritious, non-milk food like fruits or cereals (see above list of finger foods). Structuring baby's meals around parents' mealtimes makes sense and sets the stage for family mealtimes later on. Your infant will want to try their parent's food and feeding table foods can begin between nine months and one year of age. Just be sure to follow the rules about tough-to-chew foods and choking hazards listed above.

How your child looks at food, mealtime and eating is very much role modeled by their parents. Keep meals nutritious and make this time fun and relaxed. Bon appétit!

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