

INTRODUCING SOLID FOODS

At four months, your baby's diet should consist of breast milk and/or formula (with added vitamins or iron if your pediatrician recommends it), but by four to six months you can begin adding solid foods. Some babies are ready for solids as early as three months, but most have not lost their tongue-thrust reflex at that age. Because of this reflex, a young infant will push his tongue against a spoon or anything else inserted into his mouth, including food. Most babies lose this reflex at about four months. Coincidentally, your baby's energy needs increase around this age, making it an ideal time to start adding different calories through solids.

You may start solid food at whichever feedings during the day are the best for you and your baby. To minimize the chances of choking, make sure your baby is sitting up, in an infant seat or high chair, when you introduce solids.

Your baby's first solid food should be rice cereal, followed by oatmeal and barley. Generally, it's a good idea to introduce wheat and mixed cereals last, because they may cause allergic reactions in very young babies.

You can use premixed baby cereals in a jar or dry varieties to which you add formula or breast milk. The prepared products are convenient, but the dry ones are richer in iron and can be varied in consistency to suit your baby. Whichever you choose, make sure that it's made for babies. This assures you that it contains the extra nutrients your child needs at this age.

When you do begin feeding solids, always use a spoon to feed your baby unless, at your pediatrician's recommendation, you are thickening the formula for an infant with gastroesophageal reflux (spitting up stomach contents). Some parents try putting solid foods in a bottle or infant feeder with a nipple, but feeding a baby this way can drastically increase the amount of food he takes in at each feeding and lead to excessive weight gain. Besides, it's important for your baby to get used to the process of eating, including sitting up, taking bites from a spoon, resting between bites, and stopping when he's full. This early experience will help lay the foundation for good eating habits throughout his life.

Even standard baby spoons may be too wide for a child this young, but a small coffee spoon will work well. Start with half a spoonful or less (about a quarter of a teaspoonful) and talk your baby through the process ("Mmm, see how good this is"). He probably won't know what to do the first time or two. He may look confused or insulted, wrinkle his nose, and roll the food around his mouth or reject it entirely. This is an understandable reaction, considering how different his feedings have been up to this point.

One way to ease the transition to solids is to give your infant a little milk first, then switch to very small half-spoonfuls of food, and finally finish off with more milk. This will prevent him from being overly frustrated when he's very hungry, and it will link the satisfaction of nursing with this new experience of spoon-feeding.

No matter what you do, most of the first few solid-food feedings are sure to wind up outside his mouth on his face and bib, so increase the size of his feedings very gradually, starting with just a teaspoonful or two, until he gets the idea of swallowing solids. Lastly, if he cries or turns away when you try to feed him, don't force the issue. It's more important that you both enjoy his mealtimes than for him to start these foods by a specific date. Go back to nursing or bottle-feeding exclusively for a week or two, and then try again.

*Foods to Avoid until 12 months – no honey, apple cider, eggs, fish or shellfish.

*Foods to Avoid until 2 years old – peanut butter

*No choking hazards – nuts, popcorn, raisins, hard candies

*Most commonly choked on foods – grapes, hot dogs, raw carrots, and apples – make sure to dice well.