

# THE CHILDREN'S CLINIC, P.C.

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## FEEDING SOLID FOODS

### AGE FOR STARTING SOLID FOODS

The best time to begin using a spoon to feed your child is when your baby can sit with some support and move his or her head to participate in the feeding process. This time is usually around 6 months of age.

**Breast milk and commercial formulas meet all of your baby's nutritional needs until 6 months of age, and remain an important source of nutrition even after the introduction of solid foods.** Research has shown that in most cases early introduction of solid foods will not help your baby sleep through the night. In addition, introducing solid foods earlier could, possibly, put your baby at increased risk of developing food allergies.

### TYPES OF FOODS

#### 1. Cereals

Cereals are usually the first solid food added to your baby's diet. They should be fed with a small spoon and never given with formula in the baby's bottle.

Start with rice cereal, which is less likely to cause allergies than other cereals. Later, when you begin other single grain cereals, try one at a time. The cereal can be mixed with breast milk or formula. Later, you can try mixing it with apple juice.

#### 2. Vegetables and fruits

Strained or pureed vegetables and fruits are the next solid foods introduced to your baby. The order in which you add vegetables and fruits to your baby's diet is not important. However, you should introduce only one new food at a time and no more than two to three new foods per week.

#### 3. Meat and protein alternatives

By 7 to 8 months of age your baby should be ready for strained or pureed meats and protein alternatives (such as beans, peas, lentils, cottage cheese, and yogurt). Do not be surprised if your baby rejects meats, however. They are usually not a favorite for babies, at first. Simply try again every few weeks.

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#### 4. Possible allergenic foods

Egg whites, wheat, peanut butter, fish, and orange juice may be more likely to cause allergies than other foods, but this is controversial. Avoid adding these foods to your baby's diet until about 1 year of age, especially if your infant has other allergies or if there is a family history of allergies.

5. Honey is not recommended before 1 year of age because of the risk of infant botulism.

### SPOON FEEDING

Begin feeding your baby with a spoon when he or she is around 6 months of age. Place food on the middle of the tongue. If you place it in front, your child will probably push it back at you. Some infants get off to a better start if you place the spoon between their lips and let them suck off the food.

Some children constantly bat at the spoon or try to hold it while you are trying to feed them. These children can often be distracted with finger foods or given another spoon to hold.

By the time they are 9 to 10 months old, most children want to try to feed themselves and can do so with finger foods. By 15 to 18 months of age, most children can feed themselves with a spoon and no longer need a parent's help to eat.

### FINGER FOODS

Finger foods are small, bite-size pieces of soft foods. They can be introduced between 9 and 10 months of age or whenever your child develops a pincer grip.

Most babies love to feed themselves. Since most babies will not be able to feed themselves with a spoon until 15 months of age, finger foods keep them actively involved in the feeding process.

Good finger foods are dry cereals (Cheerios, Rice Krispies, etc.), cottage cheese, slices of cheese, pieces of scrambled egg yolk, slices of canned fruit (peaches, pears, or pineapple), slices of soft fresh fruits (especially banana), crackers, cookies, and breads.

### SNACKS

Once your baby goes to three meals a day, or eats at 5-hour intervals, he or she may need small snacks to tide him or her over between meals. Most babies begin this pattern between 6 and 9 months of age. The midmorning and mid-afternoon snack should be a nutritious, non-milk food. Fruits and dry cereals

are recommended. If your child is not hungry at mealtime cut back on the snacks or eliminate them.

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### TABLE FOODS

Once your baby shows a general tolerance for strained foods, feel free to experiment with some “real” food from your own plate. Mash or tear food into bite-size pieces and, again, GO SLOWLY. Adapted from B.D. Schmitt, M.D., author of Your Child’s Health, Bantam Books.

Additional reading suggestions:

Vicki Lansky, Feed Me, I’m Yours, Bantam Books, originally published in 1974, revised 1986.

Ellyn Satter, R.D., How To Get Your Kid To Eat...But Not Too Much, Bull Publishing Co., Palo Alto. CA, 1987.

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By approximately 1 year of age, your child will probably be eating most of the same meals you eat. This assumes that your own diet is well balanced.

### GAGGING

Biting, chewing, and swallowing in a coordinated way are all learned skills. All babies will gag occasionally on their food while learning these skills. Don’t panic! Give your baby at least 30 seconds to clear the offending food away. Turning red or purple is very common when a baby gags.

**Avoid foods that he or she could choke on, such as: raw carrots, candy, gum, peanuts or other nuts, and popcorn.**

Now is also the best time to start the rule that “playtime is playtime and eat time is eat time”. **Eating should be a sitting activity**. Most serious choking accidents occur when toddlers fall down while running with food in their mouth. This is an accident that is truly preventable.

### IRON-RICH FOODS

Throughout our lives we need iron in our diet to prevent anemia. Certain foods are especially good sources of iron. Red meats, fish, and poultry are best. Some children will only eat lunchmeats, and the low-fat ones are fine. Adequate iron is also found in iron-enriched cereals, beans of all types, egg yolks, peanut butter, raisins, prune juice, sweet potatoes, and spinach.

**Caution against peanut butter** in large amounts. It can stick to the roof of the mouth and cause obstruction.

### VITAMINS AND FLUORIDE

Added vitamins are not necessary after your child is 1 year old and is eating a balanced diet. If he or she is a picky eater, giving a daily children’s vitamin supplement is a reasonable thing to do.

A fluoride supplement will be prescribed at 6 months of age if your water is not fluoridated. Fluoride, in the correct amount, is very effective in preventing cavities. However, it should not be over used. Check with your water company regarding fluoride in the water, or if you have well water, have the fluoride content checked, prior to giving fluoride to your child. Fluoride should be given with water or juice once a day. *Do not give it with milk or formula. It would not be well absorbed.* Do not give fluoride while on vacation or trips away from home since you will not know the fluoride content of the water. Monitor and limit the amount of fluoridated toothpaste swallowed in young children.  
3 Adapted from B.D. Schmitt, M.D., author of Your Child’s Health, Bantam Books.

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