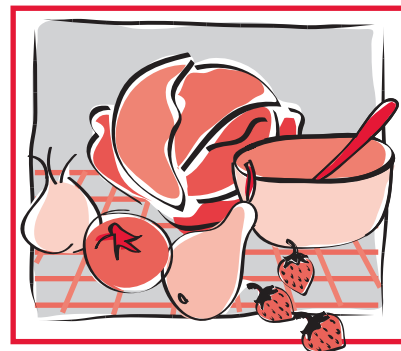


# Introducing Solid Foods to Infants

Fact Sheet No. 9.358

Food and Nutrition Series | Health



by J. Anderson\*

The introduction of semisolid and solid foods to an infant's diet has changed since 1920, when these foods were seldom offered before 12 months. During the 1960s and 1970s, solid foods often were fed to infants in the first three months and viewed as a milestone achievement. Many people also believe that feeding solid foods (such as cereal) before four months will make an infant sleep through the night. This is not true.

Many pediatric health care professionals were concerned that an early introduction of solid foods increases the risk of overfeeding and food allergies. An infant's developmental readiness should determine when to feed semisolid foods. In fact, breast milk or iron-fortified formula supplies all the nutrition an infant needs in the first few months.

## When to Start

The child's age, appetite and growth rate are factors that help determine when to feed solid foods. Before feeding solid foods, the baby should be able to:

- swallow and digest solid foods,
- sit with support and have neck and head control, and
- close their lips over a spoon.

Semisolid foods and juices are a significant change and should not be started until four to six months. This age usually coincides with the neuromuscular development necessary to eat solid foods.

Introduce single-ingredient foods one at a time at weekly intervals. This process helps identify any food sensitivities the child might have. The sequence of new foods is not critical, but rice cereal mixed with breast milk or formula is a good first choice. Add vegetables, fruits and meats to the infant's diet one at a time. Serving mixed foods is

not recommended in the beginning. (See Table 1.)

Food can be homemade or commercially prepared, depending on the mother's needs. Choose plain, strained fruit such as applesauce, peaches or mashed ripe bananas. Do not offer fruit desserts that contain unnecessary sugar. They provide unneeded calories and may cause a preference for sweets as the child gets older. Introduce juices when your baby learns to drink from a cup, around six to nine months. Dilute adult juices half and half with water or strain them before giving to a baby. Avoid sweet drinks; they can promote tooth decay.

To make baby food, boil the vegetables and fruits until tender. Cool. Blend until there are no lumps. If it is too thick, add breast milk, baby formula or a little water.

Remember:

- Begin with single-ingredient foods (such as rice cereal).
- Wait five days between new foods.
- Feed the baby when he or she is hungry, but do not overfeed.
- Make meal time a happy time.
- Never force your child to finish bottles or food. This can cause the baby to ignore what his or her body says and may lead to poor eating habits later. Watch for cues from your baby.

## Starting Solids

- Offer new food when your baby is in a good mood, not too tired and not too hungry. Serve solids after the baby has had a little breast milk or formula.
- Hold the baby on your lap or use an infant seat or feeding chair if the baby can sit.
- Use a baby spoon and place a small amount (about 1/2 teaspoon) of food on the baby's tongue.
- Give the baby time to learn to swallow these foods and get used to the new tastes.

## Quick Facts

- Mother's milk or an iron-fortified formula supplies all the nutrients a baby needs during the first six months.
- An infant's developmental readiness should determine when to feed solid foods.
- Introduce single-ingredient foods one at a time at weekly intervals.
- Avoid sweetened foods because they can promote tooth decay and may cause a preference for sweets.

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- Never use a bottle or other feeding device for semisolid food.
- Do not feed baby directly from the jar; use a clean dish. Heat only the amount baby will eat and throw leftovers away.
- Make meal time fun for your infant.

## References

Colorado EFNEP 1990. *Only the best for your baby.*

Ellen Satter, R.D. *Child of Mine.* Kampmann & Co., Inc. 1983.

| Table 1. Calendar for feeding your baby for the first year of life.   |                        |   |   |  |   |   |  |                           |   |   |                                 |  |   |  |
|---|------------------------|---|---|--|---|---|--|---------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Foods   | Birth                  | 1 | 2 | 3  | 4 | 5 | 6  | 7                         | 8 | 9   | 10                              | 11   | 12 months   |  |
| Breast milk or iron-fortified formula   | Breast milk or formula |   |   | Continue breast milk or iron-fortified formula   |   |   |  |                           |   |   |                                 |  | Start whole cow's milk from cup.                  |  |
| Cereals and grain products  |                        |   |   | Iron-fortified plain infant cereal (no fruit flavor or mixed grains). Start with rice, then oatmeal or barley. |   |   |  | Teething biscuits         |   | Mixed grain cereals. Noodles, rice. Bread and toast strips. |                                 |  |   |  |
| Vegetables  |                        |   |   |  |   |   | Strained, single vegetables.                                   |                           |   | Cooked vegetables, mashed or chopped.                       |                                 | Sliced, cooked vegetables or finger-feeding. |   |  |
| Fruit & fruit juices  |                        |   |   |  |   |   | Strained, single fruits.                                       | Unsweetened fruit juices. |   | Cooked, canned, or soft, fresh fruits, mashed or chopped.   |                                 | Sliced, soft fruit for finger feeding.       |   |  |
| Meat and other protein foods.   |                        |   |   |  |   |   | Strained single meats. Pureed dried beans, peas. plain yogurt. |                           |   |   | Same foods, chopped or mashed.  |  | Same foods, bite-sized pieces for finger feeding. |  |
|   |                        |   |   |  |   |   |  |                           |   |   | Cottage cheese, mashed egg yolk |  | Creamy peanut butter.                             |  |
| Egg white and fish  |                        |   |   |  |   |   |  |                           |   |   |                                 | Egg white. Tender, flaked, boneless fish.    |   |  |
| <b>SPECIAL NOTE:</b> Some foods may cause choking. Because of this, avoid raw carrots, nuts, seeds, raisins, grapes, popcorn and pieces of hot dogs during baby's first year. |                        |   |   |  |   |   |  |                           |   |   |                                 |  |   |  |