

E Nurture

A newsletter for breastfeeding mothers
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Starting Solid Foods

Breastmilk provides complete nutrition for babies until about six months of age. It contains all of the nutrients in all of the right amounts to promote optimal mental and physical growth. Introducing other foods or liquids into the baby's diet before she is six months old replaces some of the complete food (breastmilk) the baby would otherwise be eating with a less nutritious food. When you wait to introduce other foods until the baby is older, the baby's appetite is bigger and the other foods are fed in addition to the breastmilk.

Just as you don't feed puppies or kittens for a time after birth while the mother nurses them, human babies only need human milk until their digestive systems mature. Breastfeeding also helps to decrease the risk of early development of allergies. Around six months of age, babies begin to need other nutrients, especially additional iron, so this is a good time to introduce other foods.

At about 6 months of age babies will start to show signs of neurological development that indicate readiness to begin other foods: they are beginning to sit-up with support, they begin to reach for things and bring them to their mouths; the extrusion reflex that automatically pushes things from the baby's mouth begins to give way to taking-in, chewing, and swallowing abilities.

At earlier ages, growth spurts triggered frequent nursing that increased the milk supply, and after a day or two the baby resumed her usual feeding pattern. At about six months, the milk may not increase enough to meet the baby's growing appetite. Thus, you begin to offer other foods.

Breastfeed first, then offer a small amount of food from a spoon. At first the baby will only eat a teaspoon or two of food, once or twice a day. Rice cereal, mashed bananas, applesauce, mashed sweet potato or yam

are all good first foods. They are easy to fix for the baby and have a smooth consistency. Check with your baby's doctor about what foods you should begin with and in what order you should add others.



Always start with single foods (not soups or stews that combine more than one food). Wait three to five days before introducing another new food. This way you will be able to recognize any reactions to it: rash, spitting-up, bowel changes, etc. Once the baby has begun eating the food, give it to her every few days. If a long time has gone by since the baby has had a particular food, re-introduce it as a new food, and wait for three to five days for any reaction.

When the baby has begun eating a fruit and accepted it well (for example, applesauce) then it is also OK to give the juice of that fruit (apple juice). However, since the baby is still breastfeeding, she does not require many additional liquids. Introduce a cup by offering sips of juice or water at mealtimes.

Starting solid food is a gradual process. Some days the baby may want more solid food, some days less, and some days she may just breastfeed. Always let the baby lead the way, don't try to feed a set amount. Stop when the baby signals she has had enough.

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There is no need to use store-bought commercial jars of baby food. They are very expensive, contain mostly water, and are highly processed thereby decreasing the nutritional value. You can steam carrots, beans, or peas, or cook them in a small amount of water. Then mash them with a fork. There are also small baby food grinders for use at the table to prepare a small amount of food at a time. (Check with Sears, J.C.Penney, Toys R Us, etc.) Or you can use a blender for larger quantities and freeze individual serving amounts in an ice cube tray. This is especially convenient for fixing a quick meal for the baby when what the rest of the family is eating is not appropriate. Just thaw an ice cube or two and the baby is ready to eat! Most of the time, the baby can eat family leftovers, mashed and thinned to the proper consistency with expressed breast milk, water, or juice.

Because **cow's milk is the most common cause of allergies**, it is wise to wait until the baby is over one year old to offer milk, ice cream, and butter. Wait with egg whites, too, although hard cooked egg yolks can be mashed and fed sooner.

When babies are beginning to eat solid foods, they need to experience all the sensations of taste and texture that each food offers. Sugar and spices are not necessary and should be limited. Also, **never give honey to a baby under one year of age**, because of the danger of botulism (a type of food poisoning).

When your **baby is able to sit** with support and bring things to her mouth, offer some finger foods to experiment

with. Small pieces of cooked vegetables such as carrots, or peas, slices of banana, and cubes of bread are fine for the baby to try out her new skills and provide additional nutrients. **Avoid hard foods** such as peanuts and raw carrots (unless shredded), whole grapes, popcorn, and large pieces of hot dogs until after age three, because the baby can choke on them.

Beginning solid foods is an exciting new adventure for you and your baby. Savor and enjoy the experience.

A word about teething while breastfeeding

Many moms are concerned and wonder if it is possible to breastfeed a child with teeth. When a baby is nursing, her tongue extends over the bottom gum and tooth line. The baby cannot bite while breastfeeding without biting her tongue.

When babies are teething there is usually a short time (a couple of weeks) when they will try to bite at the end of a feeding. During this time, moms need to be alert to notice when suckling stops and the baby might bite. Biting can be avoided by having the mom put her finger in the side of the baby's mouth between the gums, and removing her from the breast promptly at the end of a feeding. If the baby bites, mom's instinctive reaction of a loud "Ouch!" usually startles the baby enough to stop her from trying it again. This noisy response, combined with ending the feeding, teach baby that biting is not acceptable. Because breastfeeding is important to babies, they quickly learn to breastfeed without biting.

If you have questions, comments, or concerns about this or any other aspect of breastfeeding, please call the lactation consultants at The Family Birth Place at Park Ridge Hospital.

Breastfeeding Helpline
(585) 368-4033