First Foods

Starting solid food and feeding your baby in the first year
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Breastmilk is the best food for babies. There are lots of things in breastmilk that are good for your baby, but are not found in infant formula milk. If your baby is not receiving breastmilk the only safe alternative is infant formula. Breastmilk or infant formula provides all the nutrition your baby needs for around the first 6 months of life. As your baby grows their need for some nutrients, like protein and iron, increases. When your baby is ready, solid foods can be started.

Starting your baby on solid foods is an important step in your baby’s life and another change in yours. Parents and carers can experience a range of feelings at this stage. You may be eager to start and move onto this next stage or you may be feeling uneasy about starting, especially after just getting comfortable with your baby’s current routine.

There is plenty of help available if you need it. Your Child and Family Health (CFH) nurse, dietitian or doctor can provide lots of advice. Family and friends may also offer to share their experiences. Take on their knowledge and experience; trust your instincts and your baby’s responses. Be confident, relaxed and most of all, enjoy this new and exciting phase in your baby’s life.

This booklet provides you with practical information on introducing your baby to solid foods, eating in the first year and progressing towards family meals. All information is written as a guide. There are no hard and fast rules. Remember, babies are individuals and develop at different rates. Introducing solid foods to your baby is an exciting experience and a developmental milestone. ENJOY!
Why start solid foods?

At around 6 months of age, solid foods are needed to provide extra energy and nutrients for your baby. Up until this time breastmilk or infant formula is usually all they require.

Starting solid foods is an important part of your child's learning and development as new colours, smells, tastes and textures are introduced through foods.

By gradually introducing different foods, over time your baby will progress to eating a variety of foods. By around 12 to 15 months of age they should be eating foods similar to the whole family's meals.

When should I start solid foods?

At around 6 months of age your baby will be ready to try solid foods. You should not start solid foods before 4 months of age.

Until around 6 months of age, breastmilk or infant formula meets all of your baby's nutritional needs. Even after your baby has started on solid foods, breastmilk or infant formula is still an important source of nutrition.

Some signs that your baby is ready to start solid foods

Your baby:
> can hold their head up and sit with support
> is able to control their tongue
> is interested in what others eat (looking, reaching and grabbing for food)
> seems to want more food, even after a full breastfeed or bottle.
Remember:
Every baby is different and there is no need to rush. Starting solid foods too early is not good for your baby. Before 4 months of age your baby’s swallowing skills may not be ready. The digestive system may also not be ready to cope with foods. It is also important not to leave it too late to start solid foods.

If you are unsure whether your baby is ready for solid foods talk to your CFH nurse, doctor or dietitian.

What about food allergies?
Food allergies have become more common in recent years. Symptoms of food allergy include:

> Local reactions – e.g. a red rash around the mouth where the food has touched the skin.
> General reactions – skin rashes on other parts of the body, hives, swellings, vomiting, wheezing or other breathing problems, or in rare cases, collapse.
> When a child has symptoms including breathing difficulties or collapse (due to low blood pressure), this is called anaphylaxis.

If you think your child has a food allergy stop giving your child the food causing the reaction. If your child has symptoms including breathing difficulties or collapse, seek emergency medical attention. If you think your child might have a food allergy, see your doctor to help identify the trigger for your child’s reaction. If the food is required to be avoided, your doctor and other health professionals are available to make sure you get the appropriate information and education. A referral to a specialist might be required.

Can food allergy be prevented?
The tendency to develop allergies (atopy) is inherited. Allergies tend to run in families.

If there is a strong history of allergies in the family, talk to your doctor or paediatrician (child doctor) to discuss what might reduce the risk of your child having food allergies. This is an area of active research world wide, and recommendations are changing as more evidence becomes available. See the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy website for the most up to date recommendations: www.allergy.org.au.
How do I feed my baby?

Start by finding a quiet place where you and your baby can concentrate on what you are about to do. Setting up a good meal time routine can be started right from the very first solid meal.

Introduce new foods one at a time, starting with small amounts of food after a feed of breastmilk or formula. Wait 2–3 days days before introducing another food. This gives time to find out if your child has any sensitivities or allergies to particular foods.

Usually people begin with a smooth puree consistency, over time you can thicken it, and try soft lumps. Use a ‘baby spoon’ or small teaspoon and offer only half a spoonful at a time.

What if my baby rejects the food?

Don’t be upset if your baby rejects or spits the food out. Eating solid foods is a new experience and it can take a few attempts before your baby becomes familiar with the taste and texture of solid foods.

Do I need to add anything to my baby’s food?

Babies enjoy foods that might taste bland to adults. There is no need to add extra sugars, fats or salt. Eating foods without additions allows your baby to identify new tastes, and enjoy the natural flavours of healthy foods.

How do I know when my baby has had enough?

Babies will let you know when they have had enough food by turning away or refusing any more. Never force feed your baby.

It is the parent or caregiver who decides what type of food is offered and when it is offered, but the child decides how much of that food to eat.
What do I feed my baby?

Feeding your baby can be divided into stages. This gives you a guide as to what foods to introduce and when. Just remember, babies go through these stages at different rates, so the ages given are just a guide.

As your baby grows and develops the types of foods and the amount they eat will increase. They will become more skilled at eating, so over time you can try different textures.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Learning to chew</td>
<td>Soft lumps, seven months to eight to nine months</td>
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<td>Finger foods, firmer lumps, eight to nine months to 12 months</td>
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<td>Family meals</td>
<td>With some changes from 12 months on</td>
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First tastes

Smooth foods – from around 6 months to about 7 months

In the beginning offer a breastfeed (or infant formula) first, and then try a small amount of solid foods. Start by offering solid foods once a day, and then twice a day as your baby gets used to solid foods.

Some good foods to introduce first are:

> **Baby rice cereal**: Plain baby rice cereal is an ideal first food to try. It is a good source of iron, and is easily digested by your baby. Cereal can be made up to the thickness your baby can manage by mixing it with expressed breastmilk, water or formula.

> **Fruit**: Well-mashed soft fruits such as banana or pureed stewed fruits (e.g. apple, apricot, pear), can be introduced once cereal is established.

> **Vegetables and legumes**: Start with cooked and pureed potato, pumpkin or sweet potato. Then introduce other vegetables and legumes like peas, cauliflower, broccoli, zucchini, carrots and legumes (e.g. baked beans). All should be well cooked and mashed to a texture your baby can manage.

> **Meat, chicken and fish**: Well blended, well-cooked lean meat, poultry and fish are good choices for your baby. Blend them with a stick blender or food processor so they are easy for your baby to swallow. These are high in iron so are important to include in your baby’s diet. Remember babies don’t need added salt or spices in their foods.

> **Custards and yoghurts**: “Baby” yoghurts and custards are a good choice as often they are lower in added sugar, however regular full fat, smooth yogurt can also be used. Small amounts of cow’s milk containing foods can be included in your baby’s diet from around six months, however, **cow’s milk should not be used as the main drink for your baby until around 12 months of age**.

It may take many tastes before a new food is accepted – it can be as many as 8–10 times before a baby accepts a new food happily.

Once your baby tolerates a range of soft, smooth foods, it is very important to move onto the next stage... **THICKER, LUMPIER TEXTURES.**
Learning to chew

Soft lumps – 7 months to 8–9 months

Most babies can manage thicker textures and soft lumps soon after starting solid foods. Once your baby can sit alone and make chewing movements they can be encouraged to bite and chew, even if they don’t have teeth.

Your baby can start trying to drink from a cup at 6 months of age. Use tap water.

Some good foods and textures to progress to at this stage are:

> **Other grains:** Other baby cereals or breakfast type cereals can also be included for variety, such as Weet-bix™ or porridge. Soften with expressed breastmilk, formula or a small amount of cow’s milk.

> **Fruit, vegetables and legumes:** Progress to a diced, minced or mashed texture. This means foods will contain soft lumps for your baby to learn to chew. Choose ripe or lightly cooked fruit, mashed, diced or grated – e.g. ripe banana, avocado, mashed stewed fruit, grated apple. Choose mashed or diced cooked vegetables – zucchini, pumpkin, sweet potato, mashed baked beans etc.

> **Egg:** Whole egg can be given. Egg is a good source of protein. Make sure it is well cooked, such as scrambled or hard-boiled and mashed.

> **Dairy:** Try yoghurts with soft lumps or grated cheese in cooking.

> **Meat:** Try minced meat, finely chopped chicken, flaked fish or canned tuna.

> **Vegetarian:** It is important to include mashed, well cooked legumes, lentils, and beans and other soft, well cooked sources of protein and iron. Talk to your CFH nurse, doctor or dietitian for more ideas.

When giving lumper textures, your baby may spit the food out or even gag on the food the first few times. This does not mean they are not ready, but just means they need to keep practising. Continue to offer lumpier textures and pieces of soft food. The chewing action helps to develop your baby’s muscles for eating and talking.

Gagging is a normal part of learning to eat and it usually frightens the parents more than the baby.
Self-feeding

Finger foods and firmer lumps – around 8–9 months to 12 months

At around 9 months of age your baby might be having 3 meals a day, along with breast or infant formula feeds.

Babies become eager to feed themselves. Encourage their efforts – this is a messy but important step. Offer pieces of food to hold and encourage self-feeding. Remember to always watch your child while they eat, and avoid foods that may cause choking. See more information on page 12 “Preventing choking”.

Self feeding is messy. A helpful tip is to put a plastic mat or old sheet down to catch the mess. But it is important that you allow your baby to practice these skills.

Start to include finger foods such as:

> **Bread and other cereals**: Bread is an easy food to encourage self-feeding, and foods such as rusks, toast crusts and well cooked pasta are also easy to pick up and chew.

> **Plates of finger foods**: Include combinations of cooked or soft fruit and vegetables, meat, dairy foods and cereals. Offer modified versions of foods your whole family eats to get your baby ready for family meals.

NB: Some babies will be very eager to self feed before 9 months of age. Offer safe foods and supervise them while eating (see page 9 for ideas).
Finger food ideas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bread and other cereals</th>
<th>Fruit and vegetables</th>
<th>Meats and protein foods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt; Strips of bread or toast (spreads such as margarine and cream cheese will make them softer and a little easier to manage)</td>
<td>&gt; Avocado</td>
<td>&gt; Strips of well cooked, lean beef, lamb and chicken (note that this may just be sucked not chewed and swallowed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; Sandwiches with avocado, Vegemite™ or ricotta cheese</td>
<td>&gt; Large sticks of rockmelon/watermelon with seeds removed</td>
<td>&gt; Pieces of soft cooked meats eg from casseroles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; Cooked pasta shapes eg spiral shapes provide easy grip for little hands</td>
<td>&gt; Banana rings or chunks</td>
<td>&gt; Cubes of tofu (bean curd)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; Pikelets</td>
<td>&gt; Orange, mandarin segments with peel removed</td>
<td>&gt; Meat or fish patties. Cooked meat or fish can be finely chopped and mixed with mashed potato then shaped into balls or patties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; Rusks</td>
<td>&gt; Canned fruit e.g. diced mixed fruit, peach slices</td>
<td>&gt; Boiled egg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; Savoury biscuits with spreads e.g. rice crackers</td>
<td>&gt; Grated or soft stewed apple, pear</td>
<td>&gt; Sticks/grated cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; Grapes cut into quarters with skins and seeds removed</td>
<td>&gt; Baked beans or other cooked beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; Stone fruit e.g. plums, nectarines, remove tough skin and stone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; Strawberries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; Soft cooked vegetable cubes or pieces e.g. pumpkin, potato, zucchini, broccoli</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; Thick mashed potato (try rolling into balls)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Family meals

Family foods with some changes – 12 months onwards

Your child can now be offered modified versions of family meals. They should have small amounts of nutritious foods at regular times through the day.

Breastfeeding can continue for as long as both you and your baby desire. After around 12 months of age your child can start to have cow’s milk as their main drink. Choose ‘full cream’ milk (not reduced or low fat varieties) as fat is an important energy source for babies and young toddlers. For most toddlers a maximum of 500ml of milk each day is plenty. Too much milk can reduce their appetite which may cause them to miss out on other important foods. Reduced or low fat milk can be used for children over 2 years.

The best drinks for babies and toddlers are breastmilk, milk and plain water. There is no need to add cordial or other flavours to water. It is not necessary to offer your child drinks of juice. Juice contains a lot of sugar. It is best for your toddler to eat fruit rather than drink juice. If you choose to offer juice, limit the amount to no more than 1 small cup (125ml) of diluted juice a day. Dilute it to 1 part juice to 3 parts water, and serve it in a cup and not a bottle. Large amounts of fruit juice should be avoided, as it can cause tooth decay and lead to diarrhoea.

Toddlers have big variations in the amount they need to eat from day to day. They can often be more interested in the world around them than what is on their dinner plate. Never force feed or bribe your child, let them eat to their appetite, and any left over food can be stored in the fridge and offered again a little later if needed.

Offer your child healthy meals, snacks and drinks. Modify your family meal and enjoy together!
Preparing and choosing your baby’s food

Preparing food at home from fresh ingredients is the best way to make healthy food for your family, and your baby.

Fresh foods are not only nutritious, but help your baby learn about colours and textures, and the natural flavours of foods.

Try cooking fresh food in large quantities and freezing it in small portions, such as in an ice cube tray. This makes it easy to give your baby healthy meals.

Canned and packet baby foods can be an easy choice, and are a safe way to feed your baby. However, it is better not to rely on canned baby foods for all your baby’s meals. Choose canned foods sometimes, when it is not possible to use home cooked meals.

Some foods such as individual vegetables and fruit pulp (with no added sugar) can be handy to include in your baby’s diet on a more regular basis.

Safe eating

Hygiene

Food should always be prepared in a clean kitchen. Wash hands well and use clean equipment to prepare, serve and store food.

Foods like meat, chicken, fish and eggs should be well cooked. Fruit and vegetables should be washed or peeled before use.

Dairy foods should always be pasteurised (i.e. not “fresh” from the farm). Always use products before their ‘use by’ date.

Regular honey (including honey on the supermarket shelf) should not be given to babies, as it can cause an illness called botulism. Some baby foods may contain “sterilised honey” and this is safe.

If using pre-packaged food, canned food or food defrosted from the freezer, take only as much as you are going to use at that time. Store any extra in a clean, covered container in the fridge. Use it by the end of the next day.
If food has been offered, but not eaten, it is important to handle and store it correctly to avoid food poisoning. These guidelines will help you to decide what to do with uneaten food. Do not keep food out in high temperatures. If food has been kept out at room temperature:

> for 2 hours or less – put it in the fridge or eat it straight away
> for more than 2 hours (but less than 4 hours) – eat it straight away
> for more than 4 hours – throw it out

**Preventing choking**

Children of any age can choke on food, but children under four years are most at risk because they:

> Do not have back teeth to chew and grind food.
> Are still learning to eat, chew and swallow.

Gagging is different to choking. Gagging is normal part of learning to eat chewable foods. It is a normal response and children recover quickly. Children should gag less as their chewing skills develop.

**How to make eating safer:**

> Do not give food or drink to children when they are running, playing, laughing or crying.
> Always sit children down to eat.
> Stay close and watch children while they eat.
> Never force children to eat.
> Encourage children to eat slowly and chew well.
> Encourage children to feed themselves.
How to make food safer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of food</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>How to modify to make food safer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foods with skins</td>
<td>Sausages, hotdogs, frankfurts</td>
<td>Remove skins, cut lengthwise, and then into small pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round foods</td>
<td>Grapes and cherry tomatoes.</td>
<td>Cut in half.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foods with seeds, pips and stones</td>
<td>Cherries, stone fruit, olives.</td>
<td>Remove seeds, pips and stones and cut into small pieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foods that are hard, crunchy or stringy</td>
<td>Hard fruit and vegetables such as raw apple, carrot and celery.</td>
<td>Grate, very finely slice, cook or mash.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corn chips, popcorn, nuts, and hard or sticky lollies.</td>
<td>Don’t serve these.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very hard crackers that don’t dissolve or break up easily.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foods that are tough and chewy</td>
<td>Meat with gristle and bone</td>
<td>Remove fat, gristle and bone. Cut into small pieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tough meat.</td>
<td>Mince, shred or slow cook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foods containing small bones</td>
<td>Fish, chicken.</td>
<td>Remove bones and cut into small pieces.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Baby Led Weaning

Baby led weaning is a term that is used to describe a different way of introducing solid foods. Baby led weaning skips the puree and lumpy stages of introducing solids (where primarily foods are offered on a spoon to the baby) instead there is an emphasis on the baby self feeding appropriate finger foods from around six months. In this approach the baby is offered suitable family foods such as steamed pieces of vegetables, bread/toast fingers, well cooked soft pieces of meat etc.

If you choose to introduce solids in this method it is important to offer a variety of foods from all food groups as you would if following the traditional approach, to ensure they are getting the energy and nutrients they need. It is also important to consider appropriate foods that are not a high choking risk as outlined on page 12 and page 13.

Babies all learn different skills at different stages. Offering a range of foods and textures will allow your baby to learn important skills such as:

> eating from a spoon
> using different muscles in the mouth
> finger feeding
> swallowing lumpy foods without gagging
> using a spoon, fork or cup on their own.

Getting the healthy eating habit right from the start

Every child is different. There is no strict time line for eating, only guidelines to help your child to enjoy healthy foods and grow well.

By offering a variety of healthy foods, textures and new flavours, your child can get into the healthy eating habit from a young age. Set a good example, and try to have a family mealtime routine.

This is an important time to start thinking about developing a healthy eating routine for life. From the first tastes of solid foods, your baby is starting to develop patterns and eating habits that will last a lifetime.
Who can I contact if I am having problems?

If you are concerned about your child's growth, reflux, constipation, food allergies or are having difficulties with any aspect of feeding it is a good idea to discuss the issues with your Child and Family Health (CFH) nurse or call the parent helpline on 1300 364 100. If you are still concerned you may like to see your General Practitioner (GP), an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) or a Paediatrician (child doctor).

It is your role to provide healthy foods for your child and make meal and snack times happy and relaxed.

Key points

> Breastmilk is the normal food for your baby.
> Solid food should be introduced around 6 months, but not before 4 months of age.
> Cow's milk should not be the main drink until after 12 months, but small amounts of cow's milk in foods from 6 months is okay.
> Always watch babies and young children when they are eating and avoid foods that can cause choking.
> Your baby can enjoy healthy family meals from around 12 months of age.
> Relax and enjoy feeding your baby, learning to eat should be fun!