Introducing solids

It’s time for introducing solids to babies when they show signs they’re ready. These signs happen at different times for different babies, but most babies will show signs by around six months. It’s around this time that babies need extra food for growth and development. How to introduce solids is partly up to you.

Introducing solids: why your baby needs them

For the first 4-6 months of life, your baby uses iron stored in his body from when he was in the womb. He also gets iron from your breastmilk and/or infant formula.

As your baby grows, her iron stores go down. This means she needs to get iron and other nutrients from solid food, as well as from breastfeeding and/or infant formula.

Introducing solids is also important for helping your baby learn to eat, giving him experience of new tastes and textures from a range of foods, developing his teeth and jaws, and building other skills that he’ll need later for language development.

Solids don’t replace breastfeeding or infant formula. Your baby needs breastmilk and/or infant formula along with solids until at least 12 months. If solid food replaces breastmilk and/or infant formula too quickly, babies can miss out on important nutrition.

Signs that it’s time for introducing solids

Your baby’s development and behaviour will guide you when you’re trying to work out when to start introducing solids.

Signs your baby is ready for solids include when your baby:

- has good head and neck control and can sit upright when supported
- shows an interest in food – for example, looking at what’s on your plate
- reaches out for your food
- opens her mouth when you offer her food on a spoon.

These signs happen at different times for different babies, but most babies will show signs by around six months.

If your baby is nearing seven months of age and hasn’t started solids, you might like to get some advice from your child and family health nurse or doctor.

How to introduce solids: food timing

When you’re first introducing solids, it’s a good idea to offer solids when you and your baby are both happy and relaxed.

Your baby is also more likely to try solids after a feed of breastmilk or formula. This is because when babies
are really hungry, they just want the breastmilk or formula that they know satisfies their hunger first. They’ll still have room to try new foods after they’ve had a breastmilk or a formula feed.

As time passes, you’ll learn when your baby is hungry or full, not interested or tired.

**Signs of hunger** include your baby:

- getting excited when she sees you getting her food ready
- leaning towards you while she’s sitting in the highchair
- opening her mouth as you’re about to feed her.

Signs your baby is no longer interested include:

- turning his head away
- losing interest or getting distracted
- pushing the spoon away
- clamping his mouth shut.

When you’re introducing solids, **how much food** should you give your baby? Try 1-2 teaspoons of food to start with, and increase to 1-2 tablespoons according to your baby’s appetite.

**How to introduce solids: food texture**

First foods can be mashed, smoothed, pureed or offered in soft pieces – it’s up to you.

Although you don’t need to puree your baby’s first foods, some foods – for example, meats – are easier for baby to eat if they’re pureed to start with. If you do start with smooth or pureed food, increase the texture to mashed and soft pieces over a couple of weeks.

Try to **change the texture of foods in line with your child’s responses**. Once she’s used to a texture, it’s OK to offer her something with more lumps. Increased texture helps your baby chew and this helps develop the muscles she’ll use later for talking.

It takes time and patience for your baby to learn to eat. If your baby doesn’t like something, try it again some other time. You might have to try lots of times before your baby accepts a new taste or texture.

**How to introduce solids: food types**

All new foods are exciting for your baby – there’s **no need to cook ‘special’ foods**.

You can **introduce solids in any order**. For example, you could try infant rice cereal, soft cooked vegetables and stewed or mashed fruit. Then you can move onto mashed foods like eggs, grains like wheat, cooked fish, pureed or minced meat, and more fruits and vegetables. You can also try tofu, beans, lentils, nut pastes and so on.

You can mix first foods together – there’s no need to introduce just one food at a time. But if you have a family history of food allergies, you can introduce one new food at a time. This can help with identifying allergic reactions.

Try to offer home-cooked meals and a variety of foods, including:

- vegetables – for example, cooked potato, carrot or beans
- fruit – for example, banana, apple, melon or avocado
- wheat, oats, bread, rice and pasta
- dairy foods like yoghurt and full-fat cheese

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cooked egg, but not raw or runny egg.

Make sure that you offer finger foods like pieces of cooked vegetables and soft bread crusts or toast to encourage chewing and self-feeding. Chewing helps with your baby’s speech development. Your baby is ready for these foods by about eight months.

**Keep breastfeeding or using infant formula until at least 12 months**, as well as introducing solids.

**Food allergy and introducing solids**

Babies with eczema or a family history of allergies are more likely to develop a [food allergy or intolerance](https://www.raisinchildren.org/parenting/food-allergy). But children with no history of allergy can also develop food allergies.

Feeding your baby solids too early – for example, before four months – or too late increases his risk of developing food allergy.

If your baby already has a food allergy, if your family has a history of food allergy, or if you’re worried about reactions to foods, it’s a good idea to get advice from your [GP](https://www.raisinchildren.org/parenting/doctor), [child and family health nurse](https://www.raisinchildren.org/parenting/care-taker), [paediatrician](https://www.raisinchildren.org/parenting/pediatrician), or [allergist](https://www.raisinchildren.org/parenting/allergist).

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**The Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) infant feeding guidelines** say that there’s no need to avoid foods that are known to cause allergies. This means it’s OK to give your child foods like egg and peanut even if you have a family history of allergies.

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**A common approach to introducing solids**

How to introduce solids will vary from family to family and child to child. But if you’re not sure how to start, here’s a common approach.

**Mealtime steps**

- Choose a time when you and your baby are calm and relaxed.
- Puree or mash the food, depending on your preference. If you start with smooth food, quickly increase the texture to mashed or soft pieces over the next couple of weeks.
- Sit your baby in a highchair, or somewhere safe, and feed her the food on a spoon. Or you could offer her a small piece with your fingers.
- Look for signs your baby isn’t interested or isn’t hungry anymore. This tells you he’s had enough.

**Tips to get your baby interested**

- Introduce different [finger foods](https://www.raisinchildren.org/parenting/finger-foods) once your baby is managing mashed food with texture or some soft lumps.
- Offer foods that your baby is interested in – that is, foods that baby is reaching for or looking at.
- Give your baby a spoon to practice with as well.
- Talk with your baby about the food she’s eating – what it is, its colour, its taste, where it grows, how you cooked it.
- Offer your baby tastes of what you’re eating to introduce the flavours of your home-cooked meals. This is also a good time for you to think about the foods you eat and enjoy healthy foods together as a family.
- Follow your baby’s interest and appetite levels. These might not be the same from day to day and will grow over time. Build up to offering three meals a day plus snacks. Your baby might not always be interested or need so much.

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Introducing solids is about much more than just food! It’s also a great time to talk and listen, as well as bond with each other.
What baby can eat at 12 months

By 12 months, your baby can eat most of the healthy foods that the rest of your family is eating, such as fruits, vegetables, nuts (but as a paste to prevent choking), grains, cereal, meat, fish, chicken, egg, tofu, lentils, pasta, rice and bread.

When it comes to fluids, baby can now also have full-fat cow’s milk from a cup. Try to keep it to around two cups of milk or dairy products a day, including any cheese or yoghurt.

Baby can stop using bottles and can hold a spoon – with varying degrees of success!

Processed or packaged foods with high levels of fat, sugar and/or salt – for example, cakes, biscuits, chips and fried foods – aren’t good for babies and children. If you model healthy eating to your baby, this helps set up good eating habits for the rest of his life.

Mealtime mess and play

You can expect your baby’s eating process to be very messy and slow. This is because eating is a skill that babies have to learn, including how to get food to their mouths.

It’s also because babies explore by touching the texture of new foods. It’s a good idea to encourage your baby to do this because it builds skills in other areas of her development, like fine motor skills and thinking.

If your baby is in a highchair, he might even learn about things like height and depth by dropping things from the chair. But if your baby is dropping all his food, he might not be hungry. It could be time for other play.

Mealtimes are a shared family time. If you can stay calm and patient with your baby’s mess, it’ll help your baby to enjoy mealtimes.

You can make cleaning up easier by spreading newspaper or plastic under the highchair and having a washcloth handy.

Preventing choking

Always supervise babies and young children when they’re eating solid food.

Sitting with your baby while she’s eating not only prevents choking but also encourages social interaction and helps her learn about eating.

When your baby is ready for solids, he’ll have enough mouth and tongue control to manage soft, smooth or pureed foods. At first it’s a good idea to avoid hard pieces of food such as raw carrot – you could give your baby grated carrot instead. Also avoid whole nuts, and fish and meat with small bones.

Salt and sugar

Your baby doesn’t need added salt or sugar. If you avoid adding extra salt or sugars, you won’t overwhelm your baby’s delicate palate or get your child used to needing these things to make food tasty.

More to explore

- Homemade baby food
- Healthy drinks for kids
- Teaching children to feed themselves
- Messy eating
- Healthy food for babies and toddlers: the five food groups

Web links

- National Health and Medical Research Council – Infant Feeding Guidelines Summary (PDF: 3.2mb)
- Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy – Infant Feeding Advice