

Food Facts for Healthy Kids



Introducing solids

STARTING OUT

When should solids be introduced?

Between 4 and six months, most commonly closer to 6 months.

Up to the first 4 to 6 months of an infant's life breast milk or formula will provide all their nutritional requirements for growth. At around six months the iron stores that baby gained while in utero begin to run low, which is one of the reasons we start solids around this time.

Don't be tempted to start too early

Introducing solids too early can be a burden to an underdeveloped digestive system (most babies digestive systems remain inadequate up to about 6 months of age), as well as impairing maternal milk supply. Other concerns include increasing the risk of food allergies and exposure to bugs that may lead to risk of diarrhoea and other gastric problems.

Most parents soon realize how convenient milk feeding is (especially if it is your second time around). The tendency to want to delay introducing solids creeps into the minds of many of us, however...

Don't wait too long

Research has not shown any benefits in introducing solids before 6 months. Leaving the introduction of solids too late can impair the nutritional status of an infant, in particular iron and zinc levels decrease in milk while an infant's demand increases. Other problems include immune challenges and reduced motor development for example of such skills as chewing.

So how much will baby eat at first?

- Infants appear to take an average of a month from the first food introduced to work up to taking more than 10 ml a day (just over 2 teaspoons), and a month and half to be able to consume more than 100 ml a day.
- It seems that the younger baby was when he or she started on solids the longer it may take for baby to get to these amounts; hence introducing solids at 6 months appears to shorten the time.

Tips on starting out

- Foods should be fine, runny puree and smooth in consistency.
- Introduce foods one at a time, with no salt, sugar or flavourings of any sort and using baby's milk source helps to ensure that any reactions can be attributed to the single food.
- Rotate foods so that each one is given only once in a 3-5 day period. This will also assist in reducing the risk of food reaction or allergy, and in the unlikely occurrence of a reaction it may become evident before the end of the day.

- Once a variety of foods have been introduced successfully they should be varied frequently to assist baby in gaining a balanced diet. Variety at this early stage may also help with getting through that fussy stage in the toddler years.
- Be persistent many studies have shown that it may take up to 10 opportunities to try a new food before baby accepts it.

Avocado was my favourite starters due to its similar fatty acid makeup as breast milk, once it is diluted (watered down) into a runny paste with breast milk or formula it can be an option that baby will enjoy early on.

Food suggestions for bubs starting out

Baby's very first foods nutritionally speaking given the quantity that is likely to go in and stay in will not provide significant nutrients, infants less than six months rely primarily on breast milk or formula for all their nutritional requirements. What the introduction of foods around this time does do is prepare the baby for new tastes, textures and modes of feeding in the next few weeks and months.

- Starting with an iron-enriched infant cereal, and while many of these are high glycaemic foods they are easy to digest and swallow for infants just starting out. Use breast milk or formula to mix into a smooth paste.
- Cooked and pureed vegetables such as sweet potato, pumpkin, carrot, choko, parsnip, broccoli, peas, potato, zucchini, cauliflower.
- Once you have introduced a few vegetables you can start to mix them and create interesting combinations.
- Mashed/cooked/pureed fruits such as avocado, apple, banana, pear, choko, strawberry etc can also be introduced, although fruit is often best left till after a wide array of vegetables have been introduced to avoid an over fondness for the sweet taste of fruit.
- If a fruit or vegetable is too runny, use baby's rice cereal as a thickener.
- By six months baby should be consuming iron fortified baby foods such as rice cereal (as per dietary guidelines for children).

The timing of food groups differs from one culture to the next and as yet there are no hard-fast rules, the following is a **guide**.

Figure 1 Quick reference guide to introducing foods

Age	Suitable foods	Consistency	Milk feeds
Around 6 months	<p>Note: Leaving sweeter foods such as fruit till after the introduction of vegetables can improve acceptance of foods that are not sweet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gluten free iron-fortified cereal i.e. rice Vegetables such as sweet potato, pumpkin, carrot, avocado, choko, parsnip, broccoli, peas, potato, zucchini, cauliflower, beans. Avocado Cooked/mashed fruit such as apple, pear, banana, paw paw, rockmelon. Teething rusks 	Pureed into a smooth paste with breast milk or formula.	Still relies primarily on breast milk or formula.
7ish months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iron enriched rice cereal should be used by 6 months. Baby yoghurts or plain natural acidophilus yoghurts which often are more nutritious and have less additives Increasing variety of vegetables first, then fruit (not citrus fruits or tomato), corn, beetroot, peas, capsicum, turnip, parsnip Increasing variety of fruit – strawberries, mango, blueberries, watermelon, plum, star fruit and custard apples Brown and white rice cooked till soft Fish Use of feeding cups over bottles Offer water regularly over the day Working up to 3 meals a day Adding of texture by mashing instead of pureeing 	Mashed into a soft and lumpy consistency, similar to the texture of cottage cheese.	3-4 milk feeds per day.
8ish months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Babies develop a swallowing reflex for coarser foods. A teaspoon of almond, linseed, sunflower or hazelnut meal (powder) added to mashed foods for protein and essential fats. Thoroughly cooked brown and white rice. Vegetarian proteins such as tofu and lentils Cheese (cheddar has low amount of lactose) White meat such as fine pieces of chicken or turkey Lumpy food 	Introduce texture.	3-4 milk feeds per day.
Around 9 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baby starts chewing and moving food around their mouth Start with gluten free cereals such as corn, millet, rice, buckwheat, tapioca and quinoa – try buckwheat and rice noodles before pasta Nut spreads (caution with allergies) Expand on cheeses (cottage etc) Red meat such as lamb mince Finger foods – grated cheese, vegetables fruit Vegetables, thin slices, grated Peeled and seeded fruit Beans Cereals, couscous, semolina, tapioca, pasta, noodles etc 	'Finger foods', grated cheese, finely chopped meat.	3 milk feeds per day.
10 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eggs (cooked egg yolk is easier to digest than egg white) Well cooked red meats Small amounts of milk, soy milk, nut milk, oat milk Egg Stews, rissoles, casseroles, sandwiches, etc 	Scrambled egg yolk. Finely chopped or minced meat.	3 milk feeds per day.
11-12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other legumes (kidney beans, butter beans, cooked legumes, soy beans, tofu) Pasteurised milk 		Weaning from breast or bottle if wished.
12 months+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most foods the family eats. 	Whole foods except nuts.	Water is best fluid.

Practical tips for starting out

- Keep in mind all babies are different and will eat different amounts, have different taste and texture preferences and progress at different rates.
- Bubs who start on solids earlier can take longer to get up to any great quantity.
- Don't push bub to eat too much initially to avoid upset tummies, he or she will quickly learn to show you they are ready for more.
- Introduce new foods only once every 3-5 days and always check for reactions.
- Try starting initially with vegetables and introduce fruit after a variety has been established.
- Include bitter vegetables with sweet veggies and alter the ratios so that some meals are a little bitter.
- Don't make purees too thick; they should be soupy to start with until your little one is drinking water. This will avoid constipation.
- Make your purees thicker than you need so you can thin them down with boiling water to take the chill off them after being in the fridge.
- Initially baby will consume only very small amounts – maybe a teaspoon or so – so what they eat counts.
- Starting out with solids is fun, which in turn sets up a positive attitude towards food.
- Encouraging baby's enjoyment in eating may mean getting in 'boots and all' and allowing baby to feel the food, mix it around on their highchair table, some may even like to wear it: there are few sights as funny as a baby with green avocado horns sticking out of either side of their head.
- All bubs are messy eaters set baby up in a comfortable and easy-to-clean environment with a bib, highchair (or similar) and consider an easy-to-clean floor mat.
- Some babies will take to a spoon very quickly while others may need practice over several attempts/days.
- If baby rejects a food, it may help to add a familiar taste such as formula or breast milk or a food that has already been given the 'thumbs up'.
- Start to introduce lumpy textures by nine months as this can impact on fussy eating habits in the toddler years.
- Warm, hot or cold? Room temperature is most babies' preference in terms of food temperature, although some may prefer it slightly warmer, for example, at body temperature (given milk straight from the breast is at this warmth). Place baby's bowl into a bowl of hot water to warm it to the desired temperature.
- Avoid using a microwave oven as they tend to heat foods unevenly – suddenly hitting a hot spot of food can be distressful and burn baby's soft mouth.
- Heating food too often can also reduce the level of some nutrients, for example vitamin C.



What should infants drink?

Babies need more water to digest their food compared to adults

- Babies' kidneys are not fully developed and therefore not as adept as adults at handling the waste products from the digestion and metabolism of food. Infants' kidneys use more water than adults to dilute and remove waste products from the body.
- As solids are increasing in volume in the diet, it becomes more important to monitor the amount of water a child is drinking, particularly in the case where milk feeds are being replaced by solid foods.
- Water is much better than other fluids, particularly to juices and cordials.
- Ensure that drink bottles and cups are placed in easy-to-see and reachable positions and check the levels throughout the day.

Dietary guidelines recommend that children:

- Are not given any fruit juice before 6 months of age.
- Are not given juice in bottles or other vessels that pour easily allowing a child to drink juice over the day.
- Are not given juice at bedtime.

It is generally agreed that young children should not be given fruit juice and that water is the most preferred fluid.

Where can I learn more?

Why not purchase a copy of our must-have step-by-step book on introducing solids. Our nutritionist mum guides you through when to start, what to start with, combinations, tips and tricks, and much more. Why not learn from the experts to give your little one the best start and to avoid any problems later.

Created by Leanne Cooper

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cadencehealth

abn: 92359484858

✉ PO Box 313 Manly NSW 1655 AUSTRALIA

☎ 02 9949 5712 ☎ 02 9949 5712

✉ info@cadencehealth.com.au

🌐 www.cadencehealth.com.au