Tips on how to start your baby on food



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Your baby stares at you as you eat, and their eyes follow everything you put into your mouth. Are they ready to join your family at the dinner table? Has your pediatrician given you the go-ahead to start feeding your baby solid foods? Here are tips on how to start your baby on food.

Before you get started

Eating a meal with family is social as well as nutritious. Keep eating a pleasant and relaxed experience. Avoid force-feeding or tricking your child into eating. Feed your baby at the family table. Your baby learns to eat by watching others eat. Family meals foster family connections.

The first taste: Babies expect a breast or a bottle when

hungry. So make sure your baby is happy and awake but **NOT** starving the first time you feed her solid food because at this point she is learning a skill, not eating for nutrition. Keep a camera nearby because babies make great faces when eating food for the first time. Many parents like to start new foods in the morning so that they have the entire day to make sure it agrees with their baby.

Babies often start out eating solid foods between 4-6 months, although it is fine to keep them on breast milk or formula exclusively until six months of age**.** Food is for fun and less for nutrition at this point. Teeth are not required; however, good head control is. It's hard to eat when you can't hold your head up! You can offer foods directly from your plate. Mash up what you are eating, or offer a piece of food too large to choke on – cue in a chicken drumstick – for your baby to explore with their mouth.

Avoid putting cereal or any solid foods into bottles. It is a choking hazard, gets stuck in the nipple and does not count as "learning to eat."

How to feed

Sit your baby in a high-chair at the table with your family. Your baby learns by imitation, so now is a great time to establish healthy eating habits for the baby as well as yourself.

Some babies will learn in just one feeding to open their mouths when they see the spoon coming, and to swallow without gagging. They already likely bring toys to their mouths to explore, so an alternative to offering pureed food on a spoon is allowing them to pick up their own food to explore and taste. Some refer to allowing babies to self-feed from the

start as “baby-led weaning.”

Other babies take several weeks to catch on to the idea of eating solids. They may gag as they try new food. This gag reflex protects their airway and allows them to spit out food that they did not properly mash in their mouth. Choking is different and is rare. Take a CPR class to learn what to do if your child chokes.

It’s best to try one new food at a time. Then, if your baby has a reaction to the food such as a rash, diarrhea, or a frowny face, you’ll know what to blame.

What to feed

Flexibility: There’s no single “best” first food. Depending on your culture, you might introduce lentils, hard boiled eggs, or oatmeal first. If giving baby cereal, mix it with breast milk or formula rather than water or juice.

Nutritional focus: Choose iron-rich foods like pureed meats, tofu, lentils, or iron-fortified baby cereals. Babies need extra iron as their stores from birth diminish.

Allergy prevention: Introduce peanut-based products and other allergenic foods early to help reduce allergy risks. Once your baby tries an allergenic food, it is important to keep it in their diet consistently. Read the guidelines here.

Avoid honey: Honey before one year of age can cause botulism, a muscle- paralyzing illness.

Tempted by food pouches? They are convenient, but also expensive. They are not as “educational” for your child, as all food in pouches have identical consistency. Plus, as Dr. Kardos likes to point out, “We are raising children, not astronauts.” Directly feeding from a pouch teaches kids to suck their food. Place the contents onto a spoon instead. Babies advance their oral motor skills when they manipulate

different textures, and their taste buds expand as they eat foods that vary in flavor.

Variety is the spice of life: once you know a food agrees with your baby, you do not need to feed the same food day after day. In particular, because of concerns of arsenic, avoid overindulgence in rice cereal.

Not all kids like all foods. Don't worry if your baby hates carrots or bananas. Many other choices are available. At the same time, you can **offer a previously rejected food multiple times** because taste buds change.

How do I know when to stop feeding?

Follow your baby's hunger cues. Feed until they turn their head away or otherwise show disinterest.

And what do I do about nursing and bottles?

Unlike adults who eat and drink at the same meal, babies eat and drink at separate times. They can continue to breast feed or bottle feed at their usual times. You will notice that the more solids your baby eats, the less liquid they drink. For a preview of coming attractions: by 8-9 months of age, most babies naturally decrease liquid intake and breast feed/bottle feed 3-4 times per day. This translates to drinking about 12-24 ounces per day.

Stay tuned for more feeding tips

Now that you've read our tips on how to start feeding your baby on food, stay tuned for more helpful feeding tips for continued success and lifelong healthy eating.

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