

Starting your baby on solids is an exciting but confusing time. Most parents have a lot of questions about starting solids. Our advice is to keep it simple. It's hard to do it "wrong". It's ok to mix up the time of day you offer solids and it's also ok to miss a day if life gets hectic! Ideally eating solids is a social and shared family experience. Babies tend to do better if they are eating alongside the rest of the family, rather than eating at a different time. Take your baby's lead - if they don't seem that interested - that's ok. Your job is to offer, and they choose if, when and how much. As long as the food you are offering is nutritious and varied, they can experience it on their own terms. Try not to create any stress around eating, nor force feed a baby. If they love solids, again, most of the time it's ok to take their lead. Milk (breast or formula) is usually offered before solids until about 9 months, then it can reverse. Water should be offered alongside any solids.

WHEN SHOULD I START MY BABY ON SOLIDS?

There has been a lot of conflicting advice about the best time to start your baby on solids. Look for signs that your baby is ready. These include:

- Good head and neck control (they do not need to be sitting independently).
- Shows an interest in food e.g. reaches out for your food when you are eating.
- Opens his or her mouth when offered a spoon.
- They have lost their tongue-thrust reflex (if they push all their food out with their tongue then they are not yet ready for solids).

This usually occurs around 6 months. Starting solids before 4 months is not recommended. The advice from ASCIA (Australian Society of Clinical immunology and Allergy) recommends that all infants are given common food allergens (i.e. peanut, egg, dairy and wheat) in the first 12 months of life. WHO guidelines recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of a baby's life and continued breastfeeding during introduction of solids. If the family is formula feeding, then this continues until 12 months of age. Cow's milk as a drink is not offered until 12 months of age, but can absolutely be used in cooking, added to cereal, or mixed with purees.

WHY DOES MY BABY NEED SOLIDS?

From around 6 months a baby's iron stores gained during your pregnancy have reduced. Breastmilk and formula do provide some iron but not enough to maintain iron levels by themselves. Learning to eat is also a sensory experience for your baby and assists in language development. They need to learn the skill of eating - this will often come with a lot of gagging! Gagging is noisy, and choking is silent. If your baby is making noises, coughing or gagging while eating solids, do not touch them as this could tip them from gagging to choking. A first aid course for parents of babies includes how to manage choking. You will need to supervise your child eating at all times.

HOW TO START SOLIDS

Embrace the mess and be patient! There is a lot of different advice about starting solids. We recommend following your baby's cues – it is your role to offer a wide variety of food, and your baby may or may not choose to eat it. It is best to first offer solids after a milk feed. If your baby is under 6 months of age, it is recommended you start with spoon feeding purees. If over 6 months you can choose spoon feeding mashed/pureed food first, or go straight to finger-food and self feeding. Offer a wide variety of foods including vegetables of different colour, fruit, meat, cereals, dairy and eggs. As the months pass, offer different textures. Expect your baby to be eating similar meals as the rest of the family by 12 months..

There are some foods that your baby may not enjoy straight away. Don't lose heart and try again another time.

THINGS TO TRY

Offer a variety of foods such as:

- Grains – bread, pasta, rice, oats, cereals
- Dairy – yoghurt, cheese, custard
- Meat and alternatives– beef, lamb, poultry, seafood, lentils, chickpeas, eggs (well cooked). You can offer strips of meat, lamb chops, chicken drumsticks or pureed/mashed.
- Fruits and vegetables – roasted vegetable wedges, steamed vegetables, soft fruits

THINGS TO AVOID

- Honey is not given until after age 1.
- Things that are a choking hazard: whole nuts, hard apple or carrot, whole grapes. Apple and carrot should be steamed or grated.

RESOURCES WE USE

The GPs at Adelaide Mums and Babies Clinic all have had young children and found the following resources useful when starting solids for their babies

- One Handed Cooks – recipe book and blog – includes ideas for family meals
- Baby Mealtimes on Instagram (page by dietitian in Perth)
- [Ellyn Satter Institute](#)
- ASCIA handout "[How to Introduce Solids for Allergy Prevention](#)"