

# First Foods



Starting solid food and feeding  
your baby in the first year



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SA Health



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Starting your baby on solid foods is an important milestone in their life. This booklet provides you with practical information on introducing your baby to solid foods and progressing towards family meals.

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

## When should I start solid foods?

At around six months of age solid foods are needed to meet your baby's increasing nutritional and developmental needs.

Signs that your baby is ready to start solid foods:

### Your baby:

- > Is able to 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 hungry even after a full breastfeed or bottle

Starting solid foods too early is not good for your baby as their 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 as this can lead to nutrient deficiencies (such as iron deficiency) and feeding problems.

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

## How do I feed my baby?

Find a quiet place where you and your baby can concentrate on what you are doing. A mealtime routine can be started right from the very first solid meal.

Start with small tastes of food given after a breastfeed (or infant formula) once a day, and then two to three times a day as your baby gets used to solid foods.

Begin with a smooth consistency and progress to thicker and lumpier textures as soon as your baby is eating a range of smooth foods.

Most babies push the food out of their mouth for a little while when they start learning to take food from the spoon. This is normal and does not mean they don't like the food. It may take many tastes before a new food is accepted.

Feeding your baby can be divided into stages – first tastes (smooth foods), learning to chew (soft lumps), self-feeding and family meals. Use the tables in each section as a guide for what foods are suitable for your baby. Babies go through these stages at different rates – the ages given are a guide only.

## First tastes

### Smooth foods – from around 6 months to about 7 months

In the beginning offer a breastfeed (or infant formula) first then try a small amount of solid foods. You may like to wait an hour after a feed to give your baby solid foods. Begin with a smooth consistency and progress to thicker and lumpier textures as soon as your baby is eating a range of smooth foods.

Start by offering once a day, and then two to three times a day as your baby gets used to solid foods.

Babies need extra iron in their diet at around six months so it is important to include at least one iron-rich food regularly in your baby's first foods to prevent iron deficiency. Iron-rich foods include:

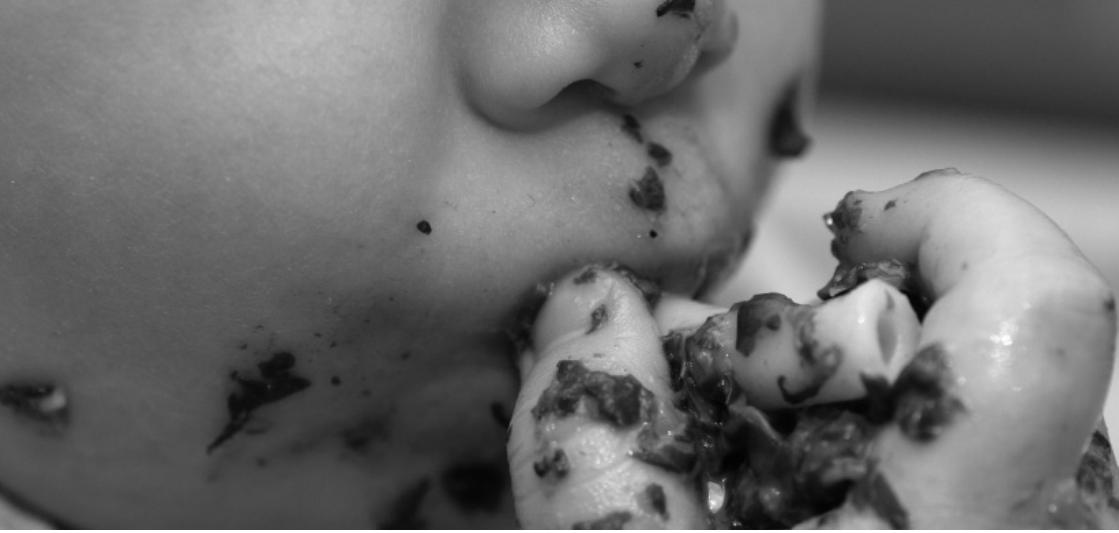
- > Iron fortified cereals (e.g. baby rice cereal)
- > Pureed meat and poultry dishes
- > Cooked pureed tofu
- > Cooked pureed legumes, lentils and beans

Other than recommending the use of iron-rich first foods in your baby's diet, there are no strict rules on the order in which foods should be introduced or the number of new foods that can be introduced at a time.

Food group	Examples of foods to introduce ( <u>iron rich foods are in bold and underlined</u> )
Grains	> <u>Iron fortified baby cereal (e.g. rice cereal)</u> mixed with full cream cow's milk, breast milk or formula
Meat, poultry, fish and eggs	> <u>Pureed meat, poultry and fish</u> > <u>Pureed tofu</u>
Fruit	> Pureed stewed fruits (e.g. apple, apricot, pear, berries) > Well-mashed banana
Vegetables and legumes	> Cooked and pureed vegetables (e.g. pumpkin, potato, zucchini, sweet potato, peas, cauliflower, carrots) > <u>Cooked and pureed lentils and legumes (e.g. baked beans)</u>
Dairy	> Baby yoghurt (these are often lower in added sugar) > Other regular full fat smooth yoghurts (e.g. Greek yoghurt) > Custards
Drinks	> Breast milk (or infant formula) should still provide most of your baby's nutrition. > Your baby can also start trying to drink from a cup at around 6 months. Use tap water, expressed breast milk, infant formula or small amounts of cow's milk

#### Things to remember about this stage:

- > To prevent iron deficiency make sure iron-rich foods are included in your baby's first foods.
- > A good first food to start with is iron-fortified baby rice cereal (made up with cow's milk, breast milk or infant formula). You may like to add pureed fruit.
- > Babies often push food out of their mouth when starting solid foods. This is normal and does not mean they don't like the food.
- > It may take 8–10 times of tasting a food before it is happily accepted by your baby. Breast milk or infant formula is still important. Give solids after or between milk feeds.
- > Once your baby is eating a range of soft, smooth foods, it is very important to move onto the next stage... THICKER, LUMPIER TEXTURES.



## Learning to chew

### Soft lumps – from around 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.

When introducing lumpier textures, your baby may spit the food out or even gag the first few times.

**Gagging is a normal part of learning to eat.** This does not mean they are not ready for lumps, they just 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.

Babies learn by watching what you do – show your baby how to eat lumpy foods by showing them the chewing motion yourself and saying 'chewing' or 'chew the food' as you do so. After a few times doing this your baby will learn what to do.

Offer your child a variety of foods from all the food groups. This table will give you some ideas about the texture of foods that are good for your baby at this stage of eating.

Food group	Food ideas ( <u>iron rich foods are in bold and underlined</u> )
Grains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Porridge, <u>wholegrain breakfast biscuits (e.g. Weetbix)</u>, <u>iron fortified baby cereals</u> made to a thicker texture</li> <li>&gt; Add pasta, rice and other grains such as cous cous and quinoa to meals to create a lumpy texture</li> </ul>
Meat, poultry, fish and eggs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <u>Minced or finely chopped meat and poultry</u></li> <li>&gt; <u>Flaked fish (e.g. salmon or tuna)</u></li> <li>&gt; <u>Mashed tofu</u></li> <li>&gt; <u>Well-cooked whole egg</u> (e.g. scrambled or hard boiled and mashed)</li> </ul>
Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Soft chopped or mashed fruits (e.g. banana, avocado, peach)</li> <li>&gt; Grated apple</li> </ul>
Vegetables and legumes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Mashed or diced cooked vegetables</li> <li>&gt; <u>Mashed legumes (e.g. baked beans, chickpeas, kidney beans) and lentils</u></li> </ul>
Dairy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Yoghurt with soft lumps</li> <li>&gt; Grated cheese</li> </ul>
Drinks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Breast milk (or infant formula) is still important in your baby's diet.</li> <li>&gt; Allow your baby to practice drinking from a cup. Use tap water, expressed breast milk, infant formula or small amounts of cow's milk</li> </ul>

#### Things to remember about this stage:

- > Gagging is a normal part of learning to eat and it usually frightens the parents more than the baby. Keep offering lumpy foods to your baby so they can learn how to eat them.
- > Make sure you include iron-rich foods regularly in your baby's diet to prevent iron deficiency.
- > Give solids 3 times each day. You can begin a meal pattern of breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- > Eat with your baby as much as you can – babies learn by watching what you do.
- > Breast milk or infant formula is still important. Once your baby is managing larger amounts of solids you can start to offer them before a breastfeed or infant formula feed.

## Learning to self-feed

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

At around 8–9 months of age many babies like to feed themselves. Encourage their efforts by offering ‘finger foods’ that they can hold, bite and chew.

Babies learn by watching what you do. Show your baby how to bite and chew by showing them the motion yourself and saying ‘bite and chew’ as you do so. After a few times doing this your baby will learn what to do.

Learning to self-feed is an important but messy step in your baby’s development. Be patient and allow your baby to get messy with the food served. You can let your baby start practising using a spoon with easy foods like custard or yoghurt. Playing with food is part of the way babies learn about different foods. Manners can be taught when your baby is older.

Remember to always watch your child while they eat, and avoid foods that may cause choking (see more information on page 14 ‘How do I prevent choking?’).

Offer your child a variety of foods from all the food groups. This table will give you some ideas about the texture of foods that are good for your baby at this stage of eating.

Food group	Examples of finger foods ( <u>iron rich foods are in bold and underlined</u> )
Grains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Strips of bread or toast Sandwiches (e.g. with avocado, hummus, commercial spread e.g. Vegemite, peanut butter or cream cheese)</li><li>&gt; Cooked pasta shapes (e.g. spirals)</li><li>&gt; Pikelets</li><li>&gt; Savoury biscuits (e.g. Cruskits, rice crackers, Ritz)</li></ul>
Meat, poultry, fish and eggs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; <u>Strips of well cooked, lean beef, lamb, chicken and fish</u></li><li>&gt; <u>Pieces of well cooked meats from casseroles</u></li><li>&gt; <u>Cubes of tofu</u></li><li>&gt; <u>Meatballs and meat or fish patties</u> (cooked meat or fish can be finely chopped and mixed with mashed potato then shaped into balls or patties)</li><li>&gt; <u>Boiled egg</u></li></ul>

Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Chopped banana and strawberries</li> <li>&gt; Large sticks of rockmelon / watermelon with seeds removed</li> <li>&gt; Orange or mandarin segments with peel removed</li> <li>&gt; Canned fruit (e.g. diced mixed fruit or peach slices)</li> <li>&gt; Grated or soft stewed apple or pear</li> <li>&gt; Grapes cut into half</li> <li>&gt; Stone fruit (e.g. plums and nectarines) with skin and stone removed</li> </ul>
Vegetables and legumes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Soft cooked cubes or sticks of vegetables (e.g. pumpkin, potato, zucchini, broccoli)</li> <li>&gt; Thick mashed potato (try rolling into balls)</li> <li>&gt; <u>Baked beans and other cooked beans (e.g. kidney beans, cannellini beans)</u></li> </ul>
Dairy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Sticks, cubes or grated cheese</li> </ul>

#### Things to remember about this stage:

- > Self-feeding is messy! It is important to allow your baby to explore food and practice self-feeding skills. A helpful tip is to put a plastic mat or old sheet down to catch the mess.
- > At around 9 months of age most babies are having 3 meals a day along with breastfeeds or infant formula feeds. You may like to start to offer 1–2 snacks each day.
- > Let your baby guide how much food they take at each meal.
- > Always watch your baby eating and provide safe foods (see information on page 14)
- > Eat with your baby as much as you can – babies learn by watching what you do.
- > Breast milk or infant formula is still important for your baby.

## **12 months onwards**

### **12 months onwards – family meals with some changes**

By 12 months of age your toddler should have small amounts of nutritious foods at regular times throughout the day.

**Toddlers have small tummies and appetites so need to be offered small regular meals and snacks.** Offer three meals and one or two snacks each day.

**Your toddler can now be offered modified versions of family foods and meals.** Take care to continue to avoid foods that may cause choking (see information on page 14) and always supervise your child eating.

**Breastfeeding can continue for as long as both you and your baby desire.** A toddler should not need to be breastfed overnight.

**After around 12 months of age your toddler can start to have cow's milk as their main drink.** Choose 'full cream' milk (not reduced fat or low fat varieties) as fat is an important energy source for young children.

**Too much milk can fill toddlers up and make them less hungry for food.** This can make mealtimes difficult and may cause them to miss out on other important foods. It is best to offer your toddler milk in a cup (not a bottle) and limit to 500mls each day.

**The best drinks for toddlers are breast milk, cow's milk and plain water.** Fruit juice, cordial and sweetened drinks are not needed. It is best for your toddler to eat fruit rather than drink juice. If you offer juice, limit the amount to no more than half a cup of diluted juice (1 part juice to 3 parts water) a day and serve it in a cup (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 of food they need to eat from day to day.** It is normal for toddler's appetite to vary from day to day and meal to meal as they have small tummies and appetites. Children are good at knowing when they are hungry and when they are full. They can easily lose this skill if they are forced to finish everything on their plate.

**Never force feed or bribe your child to eat.** Parents and carers need to decide what type of food is offered and when it is offered. It is up to the child to decide how much to eat.

## Foods and drinks that are not suitable for your baby

- > **Honey** – can cause an illness called botulism and should not be given to babies under 12 months.
- > **Fruit juice** – high in sugar and can cause tooth decay. Should not be given to babies under 12 months and should be limited in young children
- > **Tea, herbal teas, coffee, chocolate drinks and cola drinks** – contain tannins and/or caffeine that are not suitable for babies and young children.
- > **Soft drinks or cordials** – are high in sugar, can cause tooth decay and are not necessary.
- > **Unpasteurised dairy products** (e.g. 'fresh' from the farm) – can contain harmful bacteria that makes babies and children very sick.
- > **Hard foods such as chips, popcorn, nuts and lollies** – can cause your child to choke and should not be given.

## Common questions

### 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 about food allergies?

There is no need to delay or avoid potentially allergenic foods (such as egg, peanuts, wheat, cow's milk, soy and fish) to prevent food allergies or eczema.

Symptoms of food allergy include skin rashes, hives, swelling, vomiting, wheezing or other breathing problems, or in rare cases collapse. If you think your child has a food allergy stop giving your child the food causing the reaction and see your doctor to help identify the trigger for your child's reaction. A specialist referral may be needed.

If your child has symptoms that include breathing difficulties or collapse, seek emergency medical attention.

### **How should I prepare my 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 nutritious and help your baby learn about colours, textures and the natural flavour of foods.

Steam or boil fruit and vegetables in a little water with no added sugar or salt. Slow cooking meat can make it tender and easier for babies to manage. Puree foods using a blender, food processor or stick mixer.

Try cooking food in large quantities and freeze it in small portions (e.g. using an ice cube tray). Once the cubes of food have set and are frozen take the trays out of the freezer and transfer the cubes into freezer bags. Label the bags with the date of preparation and the type of food. Frozen food should be used within a month of freezing.

### **What about commercial baby foods?**

It is best not to rely on canned and packet baby foods for all of your baby's meals. Frequent use of these foods may lead to delayed chewing and poor acceptance of new tastes and textures. Choose these foods sometimes, when it is not possible to use home cooked meals. Some commercial 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.

### **What about food safety?**

Babies are at greater risk of serious illness from food poisoning. It is important to keep your baby's food safe. Tips for keeping baby food safe:

- > Always wash your hands before preparing food
- > Use clean equipment to prepare, serve and store food
- > Foods like meat, chicken, fish and eggs should be well cooked
- > Wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly before preparing
- > Store prepared food in a sealed container in the fridge or freezer
- > Re-heat pre-prepared food thoroughly before cooling it down to give your baby
- > Never re-heat food more than once
- > Dairy foods should always be pasteurised (i.e. not 'fresh from the farm').
- > Always use products before their use-by date

- > If food has been kept out at room temperature (but not eaten):
  - For two hours or less – put it in the fridge or eat it straight away
  - For more than two hours (but less than four hours) – eat it straight away
  - For more than four hours – throw it out

### **How do I prevent choking?**

Children of any age can choke on food, but children under four years are most at risk because they have fewer teeth and are still learning to eat, chew and swallow.

Gagging is different to choking. Gagging is a normal part of learning to eat chewable foods. Children should gag less as their chewing skills develop.

### **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
- > Encourage children to eat slowly and chew well
- > Encourage children to feed themselves

### How to make food safer:

Type of food	Examples	How to change the food to make it safer
Foods with skins	Sausages, hotdogs, frankfurts	Remove skins, cut lengthwise, and then into smaller pieces
Round foods	Grapes and cherry tomatoes	Cut in half
Foods with seeds, pips and stones	Cherries, stone fruit, olives	Remove seeds, pips and stones and cut into smaller pieces
Hard fruits or vegetables	Raw apple, carrot and celery	Grate, very finely slice, cook or mash
Foods that are hard, crunchy or stringy	Corn chips, popcorn, nuts, hard sticky lollies, hard crackers (that don't dissolve or break up easily).	Don't give these foods
Foods that are tough and chewy	Meat with gristle and bone. Tough meat	Remove fat, gristle and bone and cut into small pieces Mince, shred or slow cook
Foods containing small bones	Fish, chicken	Remove bones and cut up into small pieces

### **Key points:**

- > Babies need solid foods at around six months of age.
- > To prevent iron deficiency make sure iron-rich foods are included in your baby's first foods.
- > There are no rules on the order in which foods should be introduced or the number of new foods that can be introduced at a time.
- > There is no need to avoid or delay the introduction of potentially allergenic foods (e.g. egg).
- > Breast milk or infant formula is still an important part of baby's diets during the first 12 months. Continue to breastfeed as long as both you and your baby desire.
- > Cow's milk should not be the main drink until after 12 months, but small amounts of cow's milk in foods from six months is okay.
- > Always watch babies and young children when they are eating and avoid foods that can cause choking.
- > Never force feed or bribe your child to eat.
- > Learning to eat should be fun! Allow your baby to explore their food and get messy!
- > Eat with your baby as much as you can – babies learn by watching what you do.

## **Further information**

If you are concerned about your child's eating it is a good idea to discuss the issues with your Child and Family Health nurse, visit the Child and Family Health website ([www.cyh.com](http://www.cyh.com)) 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 Practicing Dietitian (APD) or Paediatrician (child doctor).

## Notes

The original nutritional and educational content of this booklet has been reviewed by specialist Dietitians at the Women's and Children's Health Network (WCHN), SA Health. Photocopying this resource in its original form is permitted for educational purposes only. Reproduction in any other form by third parties is prohibited. Not for commercial use or resale for profit.

Food product information contained in this booklet was up to date at the time of revision. If you are not sure about a food, check with the manufacturer.

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