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IFAS EXTENSION

Introducing Solid Foods¹

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How exciting it is when your baby is ready for solid food! This fact sheet will help you know when and how to start feeding solid foods. You also will be able to help your infant make the change to table food as he or she grows into the toddler years.

When Is The Right Time?

Some parents are very anxious for their babies to eat solid food. But it's important to wait until your baby is ready for this change in diet. Your baby will let you know that he or she is ready for more than just breast milk or formula by doing the following:

- ◆ Sits up without help.
- ◆ Drools when hungry.
- ◆ Opens his or her mouth when the spoon approaches.
- ◆ Doesn't push the spoon out with his or her tongue.



Most babies are ready for solid food between four and six months of age. Before this time, breast milk or iron-fortified infant formula meets all of their nutritional needs.

Baby's First Solid Food

Your baby's first solid food needs to be easy to swallow and easy to digest. One popular first food in this country is iron-fortified infant rice cereal.

Iron-fortified infant rice cereal provides several nutrients that babies need more of when they reach about six months of age.



Also, your baby is not likely to be allergic to rice cereal. That makes it a good choice if your family has a history of food allergies.

To prepare the cereal for baby, mix it with breast milk or infant formula. At first it needs to be "soupy" so your baby can swallow it. Later, you can make it thicker as baby gets better at handling food in his or her mouth.

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Infant rice cereal is a good choice for baby's first food, but not the only one.



Some parents choose to offer a fruit or vegetable as baby's first food. Mild tasting ones are best for most babies at the

beginning. The food must be cooked and mashed so your infant can swallow it easily.

Holding babies the first few times they are fed with a spoon helps to comfort them. Be aware that babies often gag or refuse food the first couple of times. That's okay. Just try again in a day or two. Remember, baby is just learning to swallow! This is very different from suckling and it may take time to learn. Soon your baby will learn to enjoy the new taste and texture of his or her first solid food.

What's Next?

Once baby is used to his or her first food, start adding other new foods, one at a time. These first foods should be single ingredient foods. That way you can look for signs of a food allergy. Wait two to seven days between new foods to be sure your baby is not having a reaction. If allergies run in your family, wait the full seven days between new foods.

It's important for babies to eat foods with different textures during the first few months that they eat solid foods.

HELPFUL HINT

Babies who eat a variety of foods in their first two years are more likely to be good eaters when they are older!

This will help them develop their ability to chew a variety of foods and avoid problems later on.

Fruits and Veggies

Fork-mashed or commercial baby food fruits and vegetables provide many nutrients for your baby. They also have many flavors and textures that your baby will learn to enjoy over the next few months.

Offer a variety of fruits and vegetables with different textures, but that are still easy to chew and swallow. Remember to give only one new food for two to seven days before trying another one. Look for signs of an allergic reaction after each new food.



Vary the type of fruits and vegetables that you offer. For example, have dark green and deep yellow or orange vegetables no more than every other day. Too much of these healthy fruits and veggies may give you a yellow-tinted baby!

FEED JUICE IN A CUP!

NEVER put juice in a bottle. Let your baby drink juice from a cup, starting at about six to eight months of age. Only give water, breast milk, or formula in a bottle.

Don't overdo the juice! Limit juice to about three ounces a day during baby's first year. More will spoil his or her appetite for other foods that are needed. When you first start offering juices, dilute them with water.

Grain Foods

By eight to ten months of age, babies can eat many of the breads and cereals that the family eats. As they begin to teethe, easy-to-hold baby biscuits help to soothe their sore gums. If allergies are in your family, wait until your baby is at least one year old before feeding anything made with wheat.

Food Allergies

Food allergies often run in families. They can be annoying or life threatening, depending on how sensitive a person is to the food. Signs of allergies can include:

- ◆ Stomachache
- ◆ Diarrhea
- ◆ Skin rash
- ◆ Wheezing
- ◆ Vomiting

If your baby shows any one of these symptoms after you start a new food, stop feeding that food and call your health care provider.

Babies with a family history of food allergies should get their first food at six months of age. Until then, breast milk or iron-fortified infant formula is the only food they need. At six months, begin giving them a food that is not likely to cause a food allergy, like iron-fortified infant rice cereal. As you give them new foods to try, be sure to wait at least seven days in-between to watch for an allergic reaction.

Here is a list of foods to avoid during the first year when allergies are a concern. Wait until well after your baby's first birthday to give them these foods.

Speak with your health care provider if you have questions.

Eggs
Cow's milk
Wheat
Soy foods
Peanuts
Tree nuts (walnuts, almonds, pecans, etc.)
Fish and shellfish



The last four (peanuts, tree nuts, fish and shellfish) should be the last foods given to your baby, well after his or her first birthday.

Moving to Table Food

After your baby is eating a variety of fruits, vegetables, and grains, you can start giving a variety of foods from the remaining food groups. Some foods that you can offer your older infant include:

- ◆ Meats (well-cooked, and milled or very finely cut)
- ◆ Eggs (well-cooked and mashed)
- ◆ Fish (carefully check for bones)
- ◆ Most finger foods, EXCEPT those that could cause choking (like popcorn, nuts, or raisins)
- ◆ Legumes, like lentils, kidney beans, black-eyed peas, etc.
- ◆ Cheese
- ◆ Do **NOT** give honey — even in baked goods — to infants under one year; it can cause botulism poisoning.

As with fruits, vegetables, and grains, add only one new food at a time and wait two to seven days to look for an adverse reaction.

Sharing Responsibility

We talked about how you can share the responsibility for feeding your baby in “Feeding Your Baby.” You continue to share the responsibility for feeding as you introduce solid foods and as they grow into toddlers.

Parent’s Role

Between about four to six months and one year of age, your baby makes the transition from breast milk or formula feeding to eating regular meals with the family. During this time, your responsibility is to provide healthy foods that are appropriate for your child’s age. And that’s where your job ends. It’s not your responsibility to see that the food is eaten!

Baby’s Role

Baby’s role is to decide how much to eat, and even whether or not he or she will eat the food you offer.

Many parents worry that if they don’t force their babies to eat that they will starve. But most parents do NOT need to worry about this. Babies and young children **will** eat when they’re hungry, if we don’t force them to eat.



Children do need to know that food will be available at regular meal and snack times. Then, they will learn to eat when

they’re hungry and stop when they’re full. If they learn this simple habit, they can avoid problems with eating that are related to obesity or eating disorders later in life.

Avoiding Food “Fights”

Following these simple “rules” will help you have pleasant meal and snack times with your young child.

- **Let Your Child Decide**

Avoid food battles by letting your children eat only as much as they want. Sometimes, if they are not hungry, they won’t even eat at all. That’s okay. Your child will eat at the next meal or snack if he or she is hungry.

- **No More “Clean Your Plate!”**

NEVER force a child to “clean the plate.” Children learn to over-eat when they have to eat all that is served to them. This can lead to eating problems and obesity in some children. It can also lead to unhappy meal times for everyone.

- **Serve Dessert When??!!**

If you serve dessert, give your child a small portion with his or her meal and let your child decide when to eat it. Even if the dessert is eaten first, a small portion won’t fill up a hungry child. He or she will then go on to eat the other foods based on their hunger. Try it and see...it really works!

Weaning

It is important to keep breastfeeding or giving iron-fortified infant formula until your baby is at least 12 months old. By that time, children are eating table food, feeding themselves, and drinking from a cup (with a little help). Then they can be weaned to pasteurized whole milk, or evaporated whole milk diluted one-to-one with water. Breastfed babies can continue to nurse after one year, at snack time and for late-night and early-morning feedings.

Feeding young children can be fun and a challenge at times. Using the information provided here will help you enjoy this most exciting time.



For more information about infant feeding, contact one of the following reliable sources in your county:

- Cooperative Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Educator (look in the blue pages of your telephone book.) Florida Extension offices are listed at:
<http://www.ifas.ufl.edu/extension/cesmap.htm>
- WIC nutritionist at the Health Department (also in the blue pages of your telephone book).
- For referral to a registered dietitian (RD) in your area you can call the Florida Dietetic Association at 850/386-8850 or check the yellow pages of your phone book.

Recommended Resources

Satter, E. *Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense*, Third Edition. Palo Alto: Bull Publishing Company, (2000). ISBN: 0-92352-151-8

Satter, E. *How to Get Your Kid to Eat...But Not Too Much*. Boulder: Bull Publishing Company, (1987) ISBN: 0-915950-83-9

Food and Nutrition Information Center, National Agricultural Library, USDA has child nutrition and health Web sites listed at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/etext/000008.html>