

# When Can My Baby Start Eating Solid Foods?

*A friend just started giving her 3-month-old applesauce and rice cereal. My son is just 2 weeks younger than hers, and I am wondering if I should be introducing solids soon too. When should I start?*

– Taylor

Doctors recommend waiting until a baby is about 6 months old to start solid foods. Starting before 4 months is not recommended.

At about 6 months, babies need the added nutrition — such as iron and zinc — that solid foods provide. It's also the right time to introduce your infant to new tastes and textures.

Some babies may be ready for solids sooner than 6 months, but don't start until your baby is at least 4 months old.

How do you know it's the right time to start solid foods? Here are some signs that babies are ready:

- They have good head and neck control and sit up in a high chair.
- They're interested in foods. For example, they may watch others eat, reach for food, and open their mouths when food approaches.
- They don't push food out of their mouths, which is a natural tongue reflex that disappears when they're between 4–6 months old.
- They weigh twice their birth weight, or close to it.

Talk to your doctor about the right time to start solid foods.

## How Should I Start Solids?

When the time is right, you can start with a single-grain, iron-fortified baby cereal. Start with 1 or 2 tablespoons of cereal mixed with breast milk, formula, or water. Feed your baby with a small baby spoon. Don't add cereal or other food to a baby's bottle because it can lead to too much weight gain. Let your baby practice eating from a spoon and learn to stop when full.

When your baby gets the hang of eating the first food, introduce others, such as puréed meat, fruits, vegetables, beans, lentils, or yogurt. Try one food at a time and wait a few days before trying something else new to make sure your baby doesn't have an allergic reaction.

Foods that are more likely to cause allergies can be among the foods you introduce to your baby. These include peanuts, eggs, cow's milk, seafood, nuts, wheat, and soy. Waiting to start these foods does not prevent food allergies. Talk to your doctor if you are concerned about food allergies, especially if any close family members have allergies, food allergies, or allergy-related conditions, like eczema or asthma.

Infants with severe eczema or egg allergies are more likely to have allergies to peanuts. Talk to your doctor about how and when to introduce these foods to your child.

When starting your baby on solids, avoid:

- foods with added sugars and no-calorie sweeteners
- high-sodium foods
- honey, until after the first birthday. It can cause botulism in babies.
- unpasteurized juice, milk, yogurt, or cheese
- regular cow's milk or soy drinks before 12 months instead of breast milk or formula. It's OK to offer pasteurized yogurt and cheese.
- foods that may cause choking, such as hot dogs, raw carrots, grapes, popcorn, and nuts

Also, do not give fruit juices to infants younger than 12 months old.

Over the next few months, introduce a variety of foods from all the food groups. If your baby doesn't seem to like something, don't give up. It can take 8 to 10 tries or more before babies learn to like new foods.

**Medically reviewed by:** Mary L. Gavin, MD

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