



Starting Solids: The Opportunity of a Lifetime

Between 4–6 months old most babies are ready to start eating mashed or pureed food. This is the opportunity of a lifetime! Remember that your baby only knows the foods that you provide and will learn to enjoy those foods. Between 4 months and 4 years is the time when taste buds are trained, so make sure to train them well. Teaching your baby to enjoy healthy foods and making healthy food normal to them is a gift that will keep on giving!

It's worth considering that most chronic diseases (such as heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes) are related to our habits, not our genetics. It is great news that even if chronic diseases run in your family, you can help prevent them in your child by making healthy habits normal from the beginning. Teach your baby that a normal diet is mostly made up of vegetables, legumes, fruits, and whole grains. Avoid processed foods and sugary drinks, and your baby won't know they exist. Don't forget that in addition to feeding your baby healthy foods, they need to see you modeling the same healthy eating patterns. You are their first and greatest teacher.

Look for signs of readiness before starting solids and always speak to your child's healthcare provider first.

Consider introducing solids between the ages of 4–6 months once your infant shows these signs of developmental readiness:

- Good neck and head control
- Sits upright with support
- Interested in food eaten by others
- Tongue thrust decreasing
- Able to suck small amounts of food from a spoon

Provide your infant with a rainbow of fruits and vegetables. Include iron fortified, whole grain baby cereal, preferably oat or multigrain.

Consider starting with bitter green vegetables first to help your child become familiar to their flavors. Expect that they will make faces and gag – this is normal.

Remember to remove skins and peels, pits, and/or seeds from fruits and vegetables.



Steamed or Poached Vegetables:

- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Sweet potato (or roasted)
- Sweet Peas
- Summer squash

Roasted Vegetables:

- Zucchini
- Parsnips
- Butternut squash
- Pumpkin
- Carrots

Fresh Fruits:

- Bananas, ripe
- Avocado
- Watermelon or soft, ripe melons
- Peaches very ripe, no skin

Roasted Fruits:

- Apple

Steamed or Poached Fruits:

- Plums
- Peach
- Pear

Get creative! Add herbs and spices for additional flavor and health benefits. Consider blending single ingredient foods to create new combinations. Avoid adding salt and sugar.

Examples:

- Cinnamon with apple
- Oregano with zucchini
- Roasted sweet potato and banana

Consider baby-led weaning when your child is developmentally ready (usually no earlier than 6 months of age). This transition from spoon-feeding your infant to your infant self-feeding with their fingers allows development of independent eating habits and helps infants learn to adjust their food intake according to their appetite.

Give solid pieces of food such as soft-cooked fruits and vegetables rather than purees and offer a variety of textures. Signs of readiness for baby-led weaning include:

- Infant feeds self with fingers
- Infant can reach for food and bring it to their mouth
- Infant is able sit up independently in a high chair and hold their head up

Incorporate allergenic foods

Studies demonstrate that early introduction of peanuts is associated with lower prevalence of allergy.¹ Talk to your healthcare provider about when would be the best time to introduce allergens to your baby.

Transition from exclusive breastmilk or formula to inclusion of a variety of solid foods routinely throughout the day.

At 7 to 9 months, an infant should be able to eat 3 meals per day. The texture of the food should be mashed with soft lumps. Provide a spoon to hold even though he/she might not be able to use it yet.

Expand the rainbow of fruits and vegetables to include:

- Beans (black, red kidney, navy, cannellini)- mashed or pureed.
- Mashed tofu
- Soy yogurt or other plant-based yogurts
- Whole grains- farro, oats, etc.
- Root vegetables - potatoes and sweet potatoes, beets

Introduce a cup by 9 months of age.

A straw cup can promote the development of a mature swallow pattern which the sippy cup does not. Straw drinking is a way to exercise the muscles around the mouth. Start with a smooth puree when teaching straw drinking, as thin liquids are harder for babies to manage at first. While learning this skill, limit the volume of the puree to 2 to 4 ounces.

Give healthy table foods in your baby's preferred texture so he/she gets accustomed to the flavors you use in your cooking. Avoid added sugar when possible.

Foods to avoid:

- Honey
- Choking hazards (e.g. whole nuts, popcorn, raisins, whole grapes)
- Sugar sweetened beverages including juice
- Fish bones

Eat together as a family and turn off all screens during meals:

Studies show that children whose families eat together at least 3 times a week are more likely to have healthy eating patterns.²

References:

1. Du Toit G, Roberts G, Sayre PH, Bahnson HT, Radulovic S, Santos AF, Brough HA, Phippard D, Basting M, Feeney M, Turcanu V, Sever ML, Gomez Lorenzo M, Plaut M, Lack G, LEAP study team Randomized trial of peanut consumption in infants at risk for peanut allergy. *N Engl J Med.* 2015;372(9):803-813. doi: 10.1056/NEJMoa1414850.
2. Hammons AJ, Fiese BH. Is frequency of shared family meals related to the nutritional health of children and adolescents?. *Pediatrics.* 2011;127(6):e1565-e1574. doi:10.1542/peds.2010-1440