

# Introducing solids

Reviewed by SickKids Staff | Last updated: March 8th 2021

Find out when to start feeding a baby solid food and how to tell when they are ready to start eating solids. Tips for introducing solids are provided.

## Key points

- Signs your baby is ready for solid foods include the ability to hold their head up when propped to sit, tongue thrust reflex has disappeared and your baby shows interest in food.
- There are many different ways to introduce solid foods. Foods can vary from culture to culture, and family to family. Start with introducing foods containing iron.
- Continue breastfeeding or bottle feeding according to the same schedule your baby was already on.

Around four to six months of age, you can begin to [introduce solid foods](#) into your baby's diet. Start slowly and pay attention to the cues your baby is giving you.



## When to start solid food

Many new parents wonder when the right time is to start their baby on solid food. Medical research has shown that your baby's body is not ready to take in solids until about four to six months of age. It is currently recommended that you exclusively [breastfeed](#) or bottle feed your baby until four to six months of age. After that time, you can then give them complementary foods with continued breastfeeding up to two years of age or beyond.

Before four to six months of age, your baby's digestive system is not mature enough to handle solids. Your baby's tongue will push out any foreign substances like food; this is called the tongue reflex, and it protects young babies from choking on foreign objects. Additionally, your baby's intestines lack important enzymes necessary for digestion, making certain foods difficult

for their digestive system to cope with. Starting your baby on solid foods before four to six months of age can also lead to less frequent breastfeeding and a decreased milk supply. If you give your baby solids before they are ready, they will reject the food, and this can set the stage for future mealtime struggles.

On the flip side, do not wait too long to start solids. Babies over six months of age are more set in their ways. They can be less willing to accept the new flavours and textures of solids, and they may resist learning to chew and swallow solids beyond this age.

There is no good evidence that delaying solids for longer than six months will protect your baby from developing food allergies, asthma, or eczema. In fact, introducing allergenic solid foods early (around four to six months of age) may prevent the development of [peanut](#) and [egg allergy](#) in infants who are already at a higher risk of developing an allergy.

For infants who are at a higher risk of developing an allergy, it is recommended that common allergenic foods be introduced at around 6 months of age, but not before 4 months of age. Common allergenic foods include [eggs](#), [fish](#), [milk](#), [peanuts](#), [seafood](#), [sesame seeds](#), [soy](#), [tree nuts](#), and [wheat](#).

Here are a few signs that your baby will show when they are ready to start eating solid food:

- They can hold their head up well when propped to sit.
  - Puréed foods can be given at this time. Do not offer puréed solids to a baby who cannot hold up their head properly. If your baby cannot sit up at all in a highchair, even when propped up by pillows and blankets, you may want to postpone beginning puréed foods until later.
  - When your baby is able to sit up by themselves, usually around seven months of age, you can start offering more chunky foods.
- Their tongue thrust reflex has disappeared.
  - Try placing a small bit of rice cereal mixed with formula or breast milk in your baby's mouth. If your baby's tongue thrusts the food out (even after several tries), it means that the tongue reflex is still in place, and you should wait a bit longer before introducing solids.
- They are able to move food from the front to the back of their mouth using their tongue. This may take a bit of practice at first.
- They can draw in their lower lip and use this action to take food from a spoon.
- They show interest in food.

- They may grab your fork, take your bread, point at your food, or watch intently whenever you take a bite.

## Introducing solid food

Baby's first meal is a momentous occasion! But there is more to it than rolling out the highchair and getting the video camera ready. If you want to ensure that the occasion is happy and enjoyable, you will need to consider the timing and setting of that first meal. Early on, feeding solid foods will be messy!

### Timing is everything

Keep in mind that the first few months of solid feedings are really just a time to get your baby used to the taste and texture of food. The actual amount of food your baby eats is not all that important, as long as they continue to take breast or bottle feedings. In fact, the first few feedings will only be a teaspoon or two at most.

Choose a time when your baby is alert and happy, and not cranky or overtired. Feeding is time-consuming, so make sure you don't schedule it for a time when you are busy with other chores. If there is one time during the day when your baby is usually hungry, you may want to give their feeding then.

### Starting out

Start by giving your baby a bit of formula or breast milk to whet their appetite, so they are not too hungry to endure the new experience. Don't give them too much formula or breast milk, though, as that will curb their appetite.

Offer your baby a quarter of a teaspoon of food. It is best if the food is a smooth, thin purée and the consistency of applesauce. If the food is too lumpy or thick like a paste, your baby may reject it. Use infant cereal to thicken, and breast milk or formula to thin your baby's food.

Slip the spoon between their lips and see how they react. Your baby may open their mouth for more, in which case you can place the next bite a bit farther back for easier swallowing. Alternatively, the food might slide right back out. If this happens continually for the first few meals, consider that your baby might not yet be ready for solids. Try again in a week or so. If your baby is ready for solids, they will start to take in more than they spit out.

Introduce solids once per day for the first few days. Once your baby has mastered this, try introducing another meal and, in another few days, a third daily meal.

## When to stop the feeding

If your baby starts to become fussy, turn their head away, clamp their mouth shut, spit out food, or throw food around, they are giving you signs that they are no longer hungry. Stop feeding them at this point, and don't force them to continue eating.

## Foods to start with

Around six months of age, try adding [the following food](#) to your baby's dietary repertoire:

- Iron-fortified baby cereal, which comes in rice, barley, or oatmeal varieties. The cereal will come as little flakes and you can mix it with breast milk or formula.
- Puréed meat and chicken
- Mashed, hard-boiled egg
- Well-cooked beans, lentils and chickpeas
- Puréed vegetables such as peas, squash, sweet potatoes, carrots, cauliflower, broccoli or green beans. It's wise to introduce vegetables before your baby has a chance to get used to the sweeter taste of fruit. Babies tend to like yellow veggies such as squash and sweet potato more than the green ones like broccoli or green beans. Vegetables do not need to be fresh; they can be mashed up frozen or canned varieties too. When preparing veggies for your baby, resist the temptation to add salt or butter.
- Fruits (after your baby has accepted vegetables into their diet). Finely mashed or strained banana is a good choice, as is applesauce. Around this time, you can also start to introduce baby cereal mixed with fruit.

Introduce new foods one by one. Look out for reactions such as diarrhea, vomiting or rash. If your baby does have a problem, this will help you figure out which food might be responsible. If your child is able to tolerate an allergenic food, like peanuts and eggs, try to offer it a few times a week to maintain tolerance.

## What are some of the first foods my baby can eat?

For more videos from SickKids experts in collaboration with Youngster, visit [Youngster on YouTube](#).

## Continuing breast or bottle feeding

When you start feeding your baby solids, make sure to keep breast or bottle feeding as usual. Continue breastfeeding according to the same schedule that your baby was already on. Over

time, as your baby starts eating more solid food, your breast milk supply will gradually decrease. This is nature's way of weaning your baby.

## Resources

[Introducing food to your baby and Allergenic foods](#)

## References

Simons E, Balshaw R, Lefebvre D, Dai D, Turvey SE, Moraes TJ, Mandhane PJ, Azad MB, Sears MR, Subbarao P, Becker AB (2019). Timing of introduction, sensitization and allergy to highly-allergenic foods at age 3 years in a general-population Canadian cohort. *J Allergy Clin Immunol Pract*, S2213-2198(19)30903-1.

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