

Feeding your baby

Starting rules

- It is best to breastfeed for the first 12 months.
- There are benefits for baby to receive breast milk rather than formula.
- Cow's milk-based formulas should be used if baby is not breastfed.
- Cow's milk should not be started until 12 months.
- In the first 3 to 4 months 'baby knows best'.
- Formula choice for healthy term infants can be based on cost.
- The only reliable measure of adequate nutrition is weight gain.
- Your baby needs only breast milk or formula for the first 5 to 6 months.
- It is good to introduce soft solid foods from 5 to 6 months but introduce them slowly.
- Babies don't need teeth to chew soft foods.

When to start solid foods?

Solids should be gradually introduced at about 5 to 6 months, one at a time. Food should never be forced but introduced slowly.

Solids should be offered after a feed or between feeds of milk. Breast milk or formula remains the most important food.

Examples of solid foods for beginners are:

- baby rice cereal mixed with their usual milk or cooled boiled water (best first option)
- cooked pumpkin, potato or carrot
- fruits such as banana, cooked apple or pear.

The texture should be pureed (no lumps).

Introduce a new food only after 3 to 4 days, early in the day, and check for any allergic reaction. Start with 1 to 2 teaspoons of solids and build up to 3 meals a day at your baby's own pace.

6 to 9 months

Lumpy foods can be introduced at 6 to 9 months, as by this time babies learn to chew.

From 6 months you can introduce well-cooked meats which contain iron (beef, lamb and chicken) and fish but be sure to remove bones and gristle. The texture should be mashed or finely chopped.

Other foods for this age include:

- milk-based foods (e.g. custard, yoghurt)
- egg yolk (delay egg white until 9 to 12 months)
- legumes (e.g. baked beans).

Solids can be offered before a drink to develop a yearning for solids.

Note: Don't cook with salt or add sugar to fruit.

9 to 12 months

By 9 months more solids should be eaten each mealtime and the milk should be gradually decreased—3 to 4 breast-feeds or 600 to 800 mL of formula is sufficient.

Encourage baby to drink from a cup rather than a bottle—a spouted cup can be used. Baby is ready for a spoon and can feed itself.

You can now introduce wheat products such as pasta, bread, baby muesli and other cereals, cheese and egg (unless there is a family history of allergy). Babies are also ready for finger foods as they learn to chew, so encourage their handling of food (e.g. rusks, bread squares, finger sandwiches, fruit pieces, cheese sticks, and cooked meat such as lamb, beef, ham, chicken and fish). Introduce minced or mashed foods to encourage chewing.

Cooled boiled water should be introduced as it is better than fruit juices and cordials.

12 months onwards

You can now introduce cow's milk and more solid foods especially meats, vegetables and fruit.

Cautionary advice

Choking

Be careful—avoid nuts, whole peas, popcorn, raw and uncooked pieces of hard fruits and vegetables (e.g. apples and carrots).

Always supervise your baby when eating, especially up to 12 months.

Cow's milk

Cow's milk should not become a main drink until 12 months of age. Babies on a cow's milk diet who eat little are prone to develop iron deficiency anaemia (seen often from 12 to 36 months). If cow's milk is used before 9 months it should be brought to the boil and cooled before use. Milk intolerance develops in some babies.

Allergies

Be alert for allergic reactions usually seen with cow's milk, egg, soy beans, peanuts and fish. Symptoms include flushing, blotchy skin, swelling of the face, pallor and wheezing soon after eating. Diarrhoea and abdominal colic also indicates intolerance. Consult your doctor if you are concerned.

Honey

Avoid honey for babies under 12 months as it may contain bacteria.

➤ FURTHER INFORMATION

The Children's Hospital at Westmead factsheets: www.chw.edu.au