

## **Solid (Strained) Foods**

### **Age for Starting Solid Foods**

The best time to begin using a spoon to feed your child is when your baby can sit with some support and move his head to participate in the feeding process. This time is usually between 4 and 6 months of age. Breast milk and commercial formulas meet all of your baby's nutritional needs until 4 to 6 months of age. Introducing strained foods earlier just makes feeding more complicated. Research has shown that in most cases, solid foods won't help your baby sleep through the night. The only exceptions are those few breast-fed babies who are not getting enough calories or gaining enough weight.

### **Types of Solid Foods**

#### **1. Cereals**

- Cereals are usually the first solid food added to your baby's diet. Generally, these are introduced to formula-fed infants at 4 months of age and to breast-fed infants at 6 months of age.
- Cereals should be fed with a small spoon and never given with formula in the baby's bottle. This is because an infant should be taught to differentiate between what he eats and what he drinks.
- Start with rice cereal, which is less likely to cause allergies and/or constipation than other cereals. Barley and oatmeal may be tried 3 or 4 weeks later. A mixed cereal should be added to your baby's diet only after each kind of cereal in the mixed cereal has been separately introduced.

#### **2. Vegetables and Fruit**

Strained or pureed vegetables and fruits are the next solid foods introduced to your baby. The order in which you add vegetables and fruits to your baby's diet is important. Yellow and orange vegetables should be added first with green vegetables following. Fruits should be added after your baby is taking green vegetables. You should introduce only one new food every 3-5 days. If there are food allergies in the family, 1 new food every 5-7 days.

#### **3. Meat and Protein Alternatives**

After veggies and fruit, introduce strained or pureed meats and protein alternatives (such as beans, peas, lentils, peanut butter).

#### **4. Possibly Allergenic Foods**

Egg whites, fish, and orange juice may be more likely to cause allergies than other solid foods, but this is controversial. Avoid adding these foods to your baby's diet until 1 year of age, especially if your infant has other allergies.

### **Spoon Feeding**

- Begin feeding your baby with a spoon at 4 to 6 months of age. Place food on the middle of tongue. If you place it in front, your child will probably push it back at you. Some

infants get off to a better start if you place the spoon between their lips and let them suck off the food.

- Some children constantly bat at the spoon or try to hold it while you are trying to feed them. These children need to be distracted with finger foods or given another spoon to hold.
- By the time they are 1 year old, most children want to try to feed themselves and can do so with finger foods. By 15 to 18 months of age, most children can feed themselves with a spoon and no longer need a parent's help to eat.

### **Finger Foods**

- Finger foods are small, bite-sized pieces of soft foods. They can be introduced between 9 and 10 months of age or whenever your child develops a pincer grip.
- Most babies love to feed themselves. Since most babies will not be able to feed themselves with a spoon until 15 months of age, finger foods keep them actively involved in the feeding process.
- Good finger foods are the following: dry cereals (Cheerios, Rice Krispies, etc.), slices of cheese, pieces of scrambled eggs, slices of canned fruit (peaches, pears, or pineapple), slices of soft fresh fruits (especially bananas), crackers, cookies, and breads.

### **Snacks**

Once your baby goes to three meals a day, or eats at 5-hour intervals, he/she may need small snacks to tide him/her over between meals. Most babies begin this pattern between 6 and 9 months of age. The mid-morning and mid-afternoon snack should be nutritious, non-milk food. Fruits and dry cereals are recommended. If your child is not hungry at mealtime, cut back on the snacks or eliminate them.

### **Table Foods**

Your child should be eating the same meals you eat by approximately 1 year of age. This assumes that your diet is well balanced and that you carefully dice any foods that would be difficult for your baby to chew. Avoid foods the he/she could choke on such as raw carrots, candy, peanuts or other nuts, and popcorn.

### **Iron-Rich Foods**

Throughout our lives we need iron in our diet to prevent anemia. Certain foods are especially good sources of iron. Red meats, fish, and poultry are best. Some young children will only eat lunch meats and the low-fat ones are fine. Adequate iron is also found in iron-enriched cereals, beans of all types, egg yolks, peanut butter, raisins, sweet potatoes and spinach.

### **Vitamins**

Added vitamins are optional after your child is 1 year old and is eating a balanced diet. If he/she is a picky eater, give him/her one chewable vitamin pill a week.