

First foods for babies



Learning to eat solid foods is a big step in your baby's development. They experience the tastes and textures of different foods and build skills for eating and feeding themselves.

While every baby is different, most are ready to start solid foods at around 6 months of age.

Why start solid foods?

Up to 6 months of age, breast milk or infant formula provides all the food and drink babies need.

From 6 months, babies:

- need extra nutrients from solid foods, especially iron
- are more willing to accept new foods than older babies
- can begin to use a spoon and drink from a cup
- can practise chewing and swallowing which builds the muscles they need for talking.

When your baby starts solid foods keep offering breast milk or infant formula. This still provides most of their nutrition for the first 12 months.



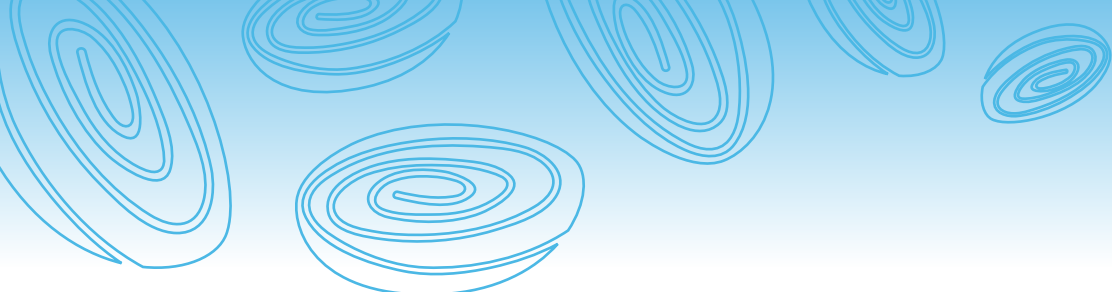
Is my baby ready?

Some signs a baby may be ready to start solid foods are when they:

- have good head control and can sit up with some support
- can control their tongue and move food around in their mouth
- show interest in what others are eating, eg looking at or reaching for food
- seem hungry after a full breast milk or infant formula feed, or want to feed more often.

If your baby is around 6 months and showing signs of being ready, try offering them a smooth food on a spoon. If they don't seem interested, don't push them to eat. Try again in a few days.

Starting solid foods should be a relaxed and enjoyable experience for your baby and you. Never pressure a baby to eat.



Learning to eat

Each baby learns to eat solid foods at their own pace.

Some stages in learning to eat are:

- from 6 months – first tastes of smooth foods
- by 7-9 months – learning to chew. Most babies can soon manage thicker textures and mashed foods with soft lumps
- by around 8 months - learning to self-feed. Offer soft 'finger foods' they can hold, bite or chew. Encourage them to use a spoon and drink from a cup.

From 12 months most babies can manage nutritious foods enjoyed by the rest of the family. These can be mashed or cut up to make them safe.

.....
Babies learn to eat solid foods at different rates. It is important to follow your baby's lead.
.....

Reflexes

- At first, your baby may spit food out or push it out with their tongue (tongue-thrust reflex). This does not mean they don't like the food. These are normal reflexes which will fade in time.
- Coughing and gagging are normal protective reflexes that can happen when babies start eating or go from smooth to lumpier foods. These can alarm parents but don't mean a baby is not ready for eating or soft lumps. Stay calm, reassure your baby and encourage them to keep chewing and swallowing.

.....
Always stay with babies while they eat and make sure they are safe.
.....

How to start solid foods

- Start by offering your baby a smooth food after a breastfeed or formula feed.
- Do this once a day and increase to 2-3 times if baby wants it.
- Foods can be introduced in any order. Include iron-rich foods to help prevent iron deficiency (see pages 4-6). Then add foods such as pureed vegetables, fruits or dairy.
- Keep giving breast milk or infant formula. This is still your baby's main source of nutrition. Over time the balance changes towards more foods and less milk.
- Follow your baby's lead and gradually change the texture of foods as they get better at eating - smooth, mashed, minced or cooked and chopped. Encourage their efforts to feed themselves.

.....
By 12 months, most babies are having 3 small meals and 2-3 snacks each day as well as breast milk or infant formula.
.....

The 5 food groups

Aim to offer a variety of meals and snacks from the 5 food groups each day.

- **Lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, legumes (beans).** This group provides protein and iron.
- **Grains,** eg oats, bread, rice, pasta, couscous, quinoa.
- **Dairy,** eg full-fat yoghurt, cheese.
- **Fruits.** Offer a variety of fresh, frozen or tinned.
- **Vegetables and legumes (beans).** Offer a variety of fresh, frozen or tinned. Include vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower and spinach rather than just the sweeter ones like carrots and sweet potato. This helps baby accept a wider range of foods as they grow up.



Preparing foods

Prepare foods from fresh ingredients as much as you can. These will be nutritious and babies learn the colour, taste and texture of natural foods.

- Slow cook meat to make it soft and easier to eat.
- Puree foods such as cooked meat, poultry, fish, tofu or legumes with a blender or stick mixer.
- Boil or steam vegetables or fruit in a little water, and puree, mash or chop.

Freezing home-cooked meals in small portions makes it easier to give baby nutritious meals and snacks. Do not add salt or sugar to their food.



Tips for feeding your baby

- **Prepare for a mess!** Be patient and let baby touch, squish and drop foods. This supports healthy development, hand-eye coordination and the pleasure of eating. A plastic sheet on the floor can help.
- **Avoid distractions.** Turn the TV off, put toys away and pets outside so they can focus on the meal.
- **Eat with baby - make meals a social occasion.** Babies learn from watching others. Show them how you bite and chew. They are more likely to try new foods if they see others eating them.
- **Let baby eat to their appetite.** Babies are good at knowing whether they are hungry or full. When they have had enough they may:
 - turn their head away
 - not open their mouth for the spoon
 - push the spoon away
 - lean back in their chair.

It's up to parents to decide what foods to provide. It's up to children to choose how much they eat. Expect their appetite to vary each day.

What about allergies?

Around 1 in 10 babies has an allergic reaction to foods such as cow's milk, egg, wheat, fish, soy, peanut, tree nuts, sesame or shellfish. Research shows that introducing these foods in the first year can help reduce allergies. This is advised for all babies, even when a family member has a food allergy or the baby has eczema.

- Start by introducing a small amount (¼ teaspoon) of one new food so you can see if it causes a reaction. For example, mix a little well-cooked egg or smooth peanut paste into mashed vegetables.
- If your baby does not have a reaction, it is important to keep offering this food regularly. Gradually increase the amount as they grow and eat more. If they haven't eaten the food for some time, they may develop an allergy.
- Keep breastfeeding if you and your baby want this.

Allergic reactions can include rashes, swelling of lips, face, eyes or throat, going pale or floppy.

If you have any concerns about allergies seek medical advice. Allergies should be diagnosed by a doctor.

If your baby has a reaction, stop feeding them that food and seek medical advice. If they have trouble breathing or become floppy, call 000 for an ambulance immediately.



First tastes

Offer your baby smooth, pureed foods on a spoon. Foods can be introduced in any order as long as you include iron-rich foods. **Iron-rich foods are in blue and bold below.**



Meat, poultry, fish, tofu, eggs, legumes (beans)

- **Meat, chicken or fish** that is well cooked, with skin, bones and gristle removed – pureed with stick mixer or blender – no added salt
- **Meat, chicken or fish** with added vegetables – pureed
- **Pureed tofu or silken tofu**

Grains

- **Iron-fortified baby cereal** (eg rice, oat or wheat based) mixed with full-cream cow's milk, breast milk or infant formula

Vegetables and legumes (beans)

- **Pureed baked beans**
- Cooked and pureed vegetables, eg cauliflower, pumpkin, peas, zucchini, potato, carrots
- **Cooked and pureed lentils and legumes (beans)**

Fruits

- Soft fruits: well-mashed or pureed, eg banana
- Hard fruits: cooked until soft and pureed, eg apple, apricot, pear, berries

Dairy

- Full-fat, natural, smooth yoghurt, eg Greek yoghurt
- Custards

Introducing common allergy-causing foods

- Add a small amount of smooth ricotta or yoghurt (cow's milk) to pureed vegetables or fruits, or mix cow's milk into baby cereal
- Add a small amount of **hard-boiled egg** to vegetables
- Add a small amount of **tofu** (soy), tahini (sesame) or **smooth peanut butter** to pureed fruits or vegetables
- **Tinned salmon or tuna, or steamed boneless white fish** can be mashed or shredded and stirred into vegetables



Learning to chew

When baby is used to smooth foods, offer thicker, mashed foods with soft lumps.

Iron-rich foods are in blue and bold below.



Meat, poultry, fish, tofu, eggs, legumes (beans)

- **Meat or poultry cooked, minced or finely chopped**
- **Flaked fish, eg tinned tuna or salmon with bones and skin removed**
- **Mashed tofu**
- **Well-cooked scrambled egg, or mashed hard-boiled egg**

Grains

- Porridge (oats)
- Wholegrain breakfast biscuits, eg **Weetbix**
- **Iron-fortified baby cereal made to a thicker texture**
- Add pasta, rice, couscous or quinoa to meals to make a lumpier texture

Vegetables and legumes (beans)

- Mashed or diced cooked vegetables
- Mashed avocado
- **Mashed legumes, eg baked beans, chickpeas, kidney beans, lentils**

Fruit

- Soft chopped or mashed fruits

Dairy

- Yoghurt with soft lumps
- Grated cheese

Introducing common allergy-causing foods

- Mash **hard-boiled egg** with avocado and/or vegetables
- Mix hommus (which has tahini/sesame) or **smooth peanut butter** into mashed foods
- Mix soft flakes of **fish or silken tofu** into mashed potato or other vegetables
- Use wheat-based breakfast cereals such as **Weetbix**, or add couscous or small pasta to savoury meals



Self-feeding

Babies enjoy feeding themselves. Foods should be safe, eg mashed, grated, minced, cooked until soft and chopped. Avoid hard foods as babies can choke. **Iron-rich foods are in blue and bold below.**



Meat, poultry, fish, tofu, eggs, legumes (beans)

- **Strips of well-cooked lean meat, chicken, fish**
- **Pieces of soft, well-cooked meats from casseroles**
- **Cubes of tofu**
- **Meatballs and meat or fish patties.** Cooked meat or fish can be finely chopped and mixed with mashed potato then shaped into balls or patties.
- **Hard-boiled egg or strips of omelette**

Grains

- Strips of bread or toast, or sandwiches with spreads or fillings, eg avocado, hommus, Vegemite, **smooth peanut butter**, cream cheese
- Cooked pasta shapes, eg spirals
- Pikelets
- Savoury biscuits, eg rice crackers, Cruskits, Ritz

Vegetables and legumes (beans)

- Soft, cooked cubes or sticks of vegetables, eg pumpkin, broccoli, zucchini, potato
- Thick mashed potato – try rolling into balls
- **Baked beans and other cooked beans, eg kidney beans, cannellini beans**

Fruits

- Chopped banana and strawberries
- Large sticks of rockmelon or watermelon with seeds removed
- Orange or mandarine segments with peel and pips removed
- Tinned fruits, eg diced mixed fruit or peach slices
- Grated or soft stewed apple or pear
- Grapes or cherry tomatoes cut into halves
- Stone fruit with skin and stone removed, eg plums, nectarines

Dairy

- Cheese cut into sticks or cubes, or grated

Introducing common allergy-causing foods

- Fish cakes made with **prawn or crab**
- Hommus dip made from tahini (sesame) with soft cooked vegetables
- Sandwiches with **smooth peanut butter**



Drinks

- Babies can start learning to drink water from a cup at around 6 months.
- Offer cooled, boiled water in a cup at mealtimes and other times. From 12 months, you can offer fresh tap water without boiling it.
- From 12 months you can also offer full-cream cow's milk from a cup.
- Milks such as goat, sheep, coconut, almond or soy should not replace breast milk or infant formula in the first year. They can be used in cooking.
- Avoid fruit juice, soft drinks or cordials as these are high in sugar and can cause tooth decay. They should not be given to babies under 12 months, and limited for young children.
- Avoid teas, coffee, chocolate and soft drinks.

Water is the best drink for children and adults. Set a good example and drink lots of water yourself.

Foods to avoid

- Avoid or limit processed foods. These are high in fat, sugar and/or salt and not good for children, eg cakes, biscuits, chips, ice cream.
- Avoid or limit processed meats, eg ham, sausages, salami, cabana.
- Avoid unpasteurised dairy products, eg 'fresh from the farm'. These can contain harmful bacteria.
- Avoid honey until babies are 12 months old – there is a risk of botulism.



Pouches

It's best not to rely on foods in pouches for all your baby's meals. These are less nutritious than home-cooked meals. They also don't help baby learn to bite or chew or try new tastes and textures. Choose these sometimes when you can't offer a home-cooked meal. Put the food into a bowl so baby can practise feeding skills, rather than letting them suck from the pouch.

Children under 2 years should have full-fat milk and milk products. From 2 years they can have full-fat or reduced-fat products with the rest of the family.

Safe eating

- Always sit children down to eat. Do not give food or drink when they are playing, laughing or crying.
- Encourage children to eat slowly and chew well.
- Do not give hard foods to children under 4 as they can choke, eg popcorn, lollies, corn chips, whole nuts. Nuts can be ground or offered as nut paste.
- Avoid chopped apples and carrots - grate or cook and mash first.
- Cut up round foods, eg grapes, cherry tomatoes.
- Remove skins, (eg from sausages), bones (eg from fish) and pips from fruits.



Always stay with babies and young children while they eat. If your child is choking call 000 immediately, or get someone else to do it. The operator will stay on the line to assist you.





Food safety

- Always wash your hands before preparing foods.
- Use clean equipment.
- Animal foods, such as meat, chicken, fish and eggs should be well cooked.
- Fruits and vegetables should be thoroughly washed.
- Always use products before their use-by date.
- If using pre-packaged or canned foods or food defrosted from the freezer, decide how much you will offer and spoon it into a small bowl. Store any extra in a clean, covered container in the fridge. Use it by the end of the next day.
- Never re-heat foods more than once.

Getting help

Babies might have firmer or less frequent poos when starting solid foods. This usually sorts itself out in a few weeks. It can help to increase the amount of fibre they eat, eg offer fruits (stewed prunes or apricots with peel left on), vegetables and oat-based baby cereals (rather than rice based). If you have any concerns about feeding, constipation or your baby is not accepting foods by 7-8 months you could make an appointment at the Child and Family Health Service (phone 1300 733 606) or see a doctor, dietitian or other health professional.

Want more information?

Parent Helpline

Phone 1300 364 100

For advice on child health, development and parenting

Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS)

Phone 1300 733 606, 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri for an appointment with a child health nurse

www.cafhs.sa.gov.au

Breastfeeding Helpline

Phone 1800 mum2mum (1800 686 268)

www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Women's and Children's Hospital

For a range of nutrition resources

www.wch.sa.gov.au

National Allergy Strategy

For information on introducing common allergy-causing foods

www.preventallergies.org.au

www.foodallergyeducation.org.au

Start them right

A parent's guide to eating for under 5s produced by Healthy Tasmania

www.dhhs.tas.gov.au

Dietitians Australia

To find an Accredited Practising Dietitian

www.daa.asn.au

Raising Children Network

For information on raising children, including starting solids

www.raisingchildren.net.au

Parenting SA

For more Parent Easy Guides including 'Feeding toddlers', 'Milestones: children 0-4 years', 'About babies', 'Sleep: children 0-6 years', 'Living with toddlers', 'Time in: guiding children's behaviour'

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Acknowledgement:

The Department of Nutrition, Women's and Children's Hospital and the Child and Family Health Service were key collaborators in the development of this Guide. Parenting SA would like to acknowledge their expertise and thank them for their generous input.

Note: The term 'Parents' in this Guide refers to anyone caring for and/or raising children, eg parents, caregivers, step-parents, grandparents, guardians, foster or kinship carers.



**Government of
South Australia**

Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department of Human Services and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

Ph: 08 8303 1660

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

© Government of South Australia.

Revised: 02/2022.