Starting Solid Foods 6-12 Months

Why do pediatricians call baby foods “complementary foods?”

Around 6 months, most infants show an interest in solid foods, which are added to—or complement—milk (breastmilk or infant formula). This is the right time to start. Before 4-6 months, giving solid foods may cause problems, like lowering the amount of milk taken, choking, or harmful excess body fat. Focus nutrients for this age group are iron/zinc, especially for breastfed babies.

Signs that your baby is ready to start solid foods

• Can sit up with little or no support;
• Shows good head control;
• Shows an interest in foods; and
• Can take food from a baby spoon.

Isn’t breastmilk alone enough after 6 months?

No. A baby’s growth is so fast during this period that it requires more energy (calories) than they can get from consuming 32 ounces/day of breastmilk or infant formula. Breastmilk is still the most important food for growth during the first year, but some extra calories, protein, and several specific nutrients are needed (iron is the most important).

How do I get started?

First, think about all the things your baby needs to learn from you:

• **Food experiences:** Over the next 6 months, until one year of age, you need to introduce your baby to as many new foods and flavors as possible. **TIP:** They may not like all of them right away. But let the baby keep tasting, smelling, and feeling them. Don’t avoid foods that you yourself don’t like; your baby may love them.

• **Textures:** You will guide your baby from thin, runny baby foods at 6 months, to pureed/mashed food around 7-8 months, to soft/lumpy/mushy foods from 8-10 months, to finger foods/chopped table foods between 10-12 months. **TIP:** Once they master feeding at one level, inch up to a little thicker texture. A little choking is common, so stay watchful.

• **Self-feeding:** We usually spoon feed baby foods at first. But babies need to learn how to feed themselves. It takes practice to master the finger and hand movements, as well as spoon and cup skills that the baby will use. **TIP:** At each feeding, let your baby play with a baby spoon thinly coated with the food and a small cup with ½-1 teaspoon of milk or water.

• **Food acceptance:** New foods, especially vegetables and meats, usually need to be offered over-and-over for your baby to learn to like them. **TIP:** Offering small amounts of a few different foods every day will make it more likely that your baby will try and like them.

A BABY’S GROWTH RATE IS EXTREMELY FAST:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth weight</th>
<th>Doubles by 4 months</th>
<th>Triples by 12 months</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth length doubles by 6 months of age</td>
<td>Brain volume doubles by 12 months and triples by 36 months of age</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Food is fun.

Clear away distractions, like TV, cell phones, and sit together with your baby. Babies learn by playing, doing, and exploring. So, let them touch, taste, smell, and feel the food as they eat. It will help them learn to like the food, even if it’s messy.

How do I know when to stop feeding?

Happily, your baby will tell you. When babies are full, you will notice them slow down in their eating, become easily distracted, close their mouth when the spoon approaches, turn away or push away the spoon.

What if food allergies run in our family?

The timing, amount, frequency, and duration of exposures to food proteins are all important to prevent food allergies. We have new recommendations to lower allergy risk: between 4-6 months, offer babies small amounts of wheat, soy or tofu, fish and shellfish, eggs, yogurt, and thinned nut butters or powders frequently. TIP: Keep your pediatrician updated on your baby’s feeding progress.

Which foods should I avoid giving my baby?

- **Food that needs to be chewed:** Meat chunks, like hot dogs or meat that needs chewing; seeds, nuts or thick nut butters; hard cheese; whole grapes; popcorn; uncooked vegetables; hard fruit chunks; candy.

- **Drinks the baby doesn’t need:** Avoid anything other than breastmilk, fortified infant formula, or water until 12 months of age.

- **Foods low in value:** Like salt, sugar, syrup, chips, desserts, honey (honey is not recommended at this age).

If your child is in child care or with relatives, make sure you know what they are eating and drinking. Maintain healthy eating plans.

Next: Balanced Feeding, Step-by-Step from 12 to 24 months

Ohio AAP PMP
Mobile App

Search Parenting at Meal and Playtime on Apple Store or Google Play

App Highlights...

- Physician-endorsed materials for parents to access on-demand
- Resources for parents organized by age
- Text reminders sent monthly and/or for age milestones
- Easy sign-up
- Videos on feeding, play, nutrition and more

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