

Introducing solids. What, when and how?

By Natalie Ebrill

The introduction of solids is to compliment the milk feeds which are the baby's primary source of nutrition until 9 months of age.

Baby's iron levels start to deplete at 6 months and their digestive system is mature enough to digest solid foods and in particular more protein. Offer baby the food on a suitable soft spoon and respect when they decide they are finished. If we watch for baby's signals that they are full, they will learn to eat appropriately, listen to their own tummy and not overeat. How many of us were encouraged to eat all on our plate "because there are starving children in Africa" and not allowed to listen to our tummy's.

Signs that your baby is ready for solid foods are:

- At least 6 months of age
 - Good head control
 - Very interested in what others are eating
 - Wanting to pull the fork or spoon out of mum and dad's hands and put in their own mouth.
 - When solid food (usually Farex) is offered for the first time, baby plays with it in their mouth but manages to swallow it.
- If baby projects the food and tongue out of the mouth baby isn't ready yet and parents should wait another week before trying again.

From 6 months-

pureed foods-pasty

- Offer solids within 30 minutes of a milk feed until 9 months of age.

1st week

- Start with 1 meal a day- farex mixed breastmilk or formula. 1-2 teaspoons and a pasty consistency for a week.

2nd week

- Add another meal to the day after a milkfeed, of pasty pureed vegetables.

3rd week

- Add a third meal after a milkfeed, of pasty stewed fruit.

After 1 month of uneventful introduction to solids (no tummy problems, constipation and unusual pains) You can add some protein to the vegetables in the form of finely chopped/pureed chicken, lamb or beef. Look for simple ways to cook the meat tenderly such as a deep base pan, slow cooker or crockpot or slow roasting.

Introduce baby to a cup with a lip to learn to drink water. Find a cup that the water flows freely from. Non-drip cups are really hard to suck on and don't reward baby for trying! Try it yourself. Sometimes you can remove the non-drip valve and the fluid will flow more easily. Water should be cooled boiled water until 18 months of age. Baby's digestive system cannot cope with the bacteria in normal tap water.

Commercial Juice is not necessary. It has up to 12 teaspoons of sugar in 200 mls. Offer freshly squeezed orange juice if desired, watch for the acid burn on the chin area. Either discontinue the juice for a few months, water it down or apply a barrier cream before giving it to baby. Not all children react this way.

From 8 months

Mashed-lumpier foods

Your baby will now be interested in finger food and spoons. While the food will initially be played with and used to decorate the face and hair, baby will get some into the mouth and learn to be independent. If you offer baby 2 plastic spoons and 4 pieces of appropriate finger food they will be distracted enough to allow you to spoon in the real meal in the bowl you are holding.

You can now introduce:

- Toast fingers
- Use avocado or cream cheese as toppings.
- Pasta spirals
- Tuna, salmon, white fish (Nile perch, Atlantic Salmon, deep sea Mullet, big boned fish. Ask the fish shop for suggestions)
- Cheese (Philly cream cheese, ricotta, cottage, feta)
- Yogurt
- Rice
- Lentils, chickpeas, hommus, tahini paste.
- Egg yolks only
- Family foods mashed up appropriately.

From 9 months- lumpy food

Baby is now eating family foods in appropriate textures and amounts. Lots of finger foods for baby to try and feed themselves with while mum or dad still feed baby mashed food with chunks from a bowl.

The food now becomes the priority and milk feeds can be dropped to 3 in the daytime only. (breastfeeds are a mutual thing between mum and baby, minimum three) Night feeds are no longer necessary.

By 11 months milk feeds can be dropped to 2 in the daytime only.

By 12 months formula is no longer needed. Baby can enjoy 1 sipper cup of cows milk or 1 breastfeed a day. (breastfeeds are still offered on demand if you wish).

Tip:

Start when baby is ready. This is usually from 6 months. Some babies start later than this and that's ok. Every baby is an individual. The message is to introduce solids slowly and please remember that the milk is the priority not the food until 9 months of age.

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