



When, What, Why and How: Introducing Solid Foods – Guidelines for Child Care Providers

Good nutrition is very important during the first year of life for infants because this is a time for huge growth. Solid foods that are given to an infant before he/she is ready can lead to digestive or allergy problems later in life. Solids should complement, not replace, breastmilk or formula in the infant's diet. Introduce foods that have been given by the parent at home.

Breastfeeding should be promoted to foster early infant contact to a variety of food flavors. Infants exposed during pregnancy and breastfeeding to a wider variety of food flavors (e.g. from mother's diet) are more accepting of new foods.

It is important to know the signs that an infant is ready to start eating solid foods (4 to 6 months). Signs can include:

- ✓ Able to sit up with support and hold head upright;
- ✓ Opening the mouth;
- ✓ Leaning forward to food;
- ✓ Close his/her lips around a spoon;
- ✓ Move food from the front of the tongue to the back of the tongue;
- ✓ Bringing things to his/her mouth;
- ✓ Wanting what parents or other family members are eating.

Infants have small stomachs, so begin with a teaspoon of food or less and give more as the infant wants it. His/her appetite may change each day! It is always important to watch an infant when he/she is eating.

Below are charts of when, what, why and how when introducing solid foods to infants.

InfaNET Nutrition for Child Care Providers – Building Blocks for Healthy Infants

When	What	Why	How
Birth to 6 months	Breastmilk or iron-fortified formula (unless otherwise recommended by a health professional)	<p>Meet the nutrition needs of a growing infant.</p> <p>No need to start solid foods early – sleep is more dependent on developmental age than nutrition.</p> <p>Important to wait till infant shows signs of being ready to start solid foods.</p>	Let the infant determine how much and when to eat.

When	What	Why	How
4 to 6 Months	<p><u>Continue:</u> Breastmilk or iron-fortified formula</p> <p><u>Add:</u> Iron-fortified infant cereals</p>	<p>Easy to digest, swallow and infants like the taste.</p> <p>Wait until infant is ready to be fed by a spoon.</p>	<p>Begin with rice cereal as it may decrease the chance of having allergies.</p> <p>Mix 1-2 TBSP of dry cereal with breastmilk or formula. Start out with a runny consistency and thicken when infant is ready.</p> <p>Offer 1 teaspoon or less at a time.</p> <p>NEVER use a bottle to feed cereals, use an infant spoon.</p>

When	What	Why	How
<p>5 to 8 Months</p>	<p><u>Continue:</u> Breastmilk or iron-fortified formula</p> <p>Iron-fortified infant cereals</p> <p><u>Add:</u> Strained or mashed vegetables and fruits</p>	<p>Fruits and vegetables are a good source of vitamins.</p> <p>Offer new foods, flavors, textures and consistencies.</p>	<p>Add 1 new food every 5 to 7 days. Monitor infant for any allergic reactions. Offer any variety of single-ingredient foods to start.</p> <p>Order of fruits and vegetables introduced does not matter.</p> <p>Once single-ingredient fruits and vegetables have been successfully introduced, move on to mixed varieties.</p> <p>Avoid home canned foods such as sauces. Home prepared baby foods are OK if made in a clean environment and appropriate directions are followed.</p> <p>Do not add sugar or other seasonings.</p> <p>NEVER offer honey until infant is 1 year of age as it may contain harmful bacteria.</p>

When	What	Why	How
<p>7 to 10 months</p>	<p><u>Continue:</u> Breastmilk or iron-fortified formula</p> <p>Iron-fortified infant cereals</p> <p>Strained or mashed vegetables and fruits</p> <p><u>Add:</u> Small, tender and/or strained/mashed protein foods (lean beef, chicken, pork, turkey, cheese)</p> <p>100% fruit juice</p> <p>Finger foods (see “Healthy Finger Foods for Infants – Guidelines for Child Care Providers” handout)</p>	<p>Protein foods are a good source of iron, protein, minerals and vitamins.</p> <p>Offers new foods, flavors, textures and consistencies.</p> <p>Finger foods should be added when hand to mouth coordination is apparent. Infants do not need to have teeth to have finger foods. Allow infants to experiment with new foods on their own, but always watch the infant when he/she is eating.</p>	<p>Avoid hot dogs, luncheon meats and bacon as they are high in salt and may cause choking.</p> <p>Offer no more than ½ cup (4 oz.) of 100% juice per day in a cup.</p> <p>Cut up meat into easy to chew and grab bites. Remove skin before serving.</p> <p>Watch foods that are hard for infant to digest: whole corn, leafy vegetables, baked beans, chocolate and onions. Remember that some children may tolerate these foods and others may not.</p> <p>Introduce the infant to a cup or “sippy” cup (a cup with a lid and spout to provide for easier drinking).</p>

When	What	Why	How
<p>8 to 12 Months</p>	<p><u>Continue:</u> Breastmilk or iron-fortified formula</p> <p>Finger foods</p> <p>Strained or mashed vegetables, fruits and 100% juice</p> <p>Small, tender and/or strained/mashed protein foods (lean beef, chicken, pork, turkey)</p> <p><u>Add:</u> Table foods including 100% whole grains</p> <p>Plain yogurt and cottage cheese</p> <p>Infant or adult low sugar cereals</p>	<p>Provide a variety of healthy foods.</p> <p>Once teeth have come in, chunky foods are often better accepted.</p>	<p>Encourage the use of a spoon, but still allow the infant to use his/her hands to eat.</p> <p>Begin to have 3 regular meals and snacks.</p> <p>Breastmilk or formula intake will decrease as intake of solid food increases.</p> <p>Do not force an infant to eat more; allow him/her to eat as much as he/she desires.</p> <p>No cow's milk should be given before the age of one year due to allergies. Other important tips on using milk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whole milk should only be used for infants who are 12 months or older. - Skim, 1% or 2% milk should not be used before 12 months because they do not have the amount of fat that is important for the infant's growth and development. After the age of 2, it is appropriate to add low fat milk products.

Other Tips

- ✓ During 4 to 6 months, watch the amount of cereal being offered, so it does not replace breastmilk or formula.
- ✓ Spoon feeding may be messy business, but that is part of learning to eat!
- ✓ Cow's milk, goat's milk, other animal milks, evaporated milk, sweetened condensed milk, soy milk and milks made of nuts or rice are not recommended because they are too high in protein and salt for an infant's kidneys. These milks may cause allergies if used before 12 months of age.
- ✓ It can take as many as 8 to 12 exposures (or more) to a food for an infant to be willing to try it; this is a normal part of learning to eat new foods.
- ✓ Feed infant food from a small dish rather than from its original jar. Do not put unfinished foods back into the jar because this can cause harmful bacteria to grow.
- ✓ Never leave an infant alone while he/she is eating.
- ✓ If an infant does not like certain foods, never force feed or use food as an award (e.g. "if you finish your peas, you can have dessert").
- ✓ Offer infants small portions (1 teaspoon or less at a time) of food as large portions can be too much for them.
- ✓ To decrease the risk of food allergies or intolerances:
 - Introduce foods to an infant that have been given by a parent;
 - Introduce one new food at a time (new foods should be single food items) every 5 to 7 days;
 - Introduce a small amount of a new food at a time (1 teaspoon or less);
 - Observe the infant closely after feeding a new food.
 - Delay dairy products until 1 year; eggs until 2 years; peanuts, other nuts and fish until 3 years.
- ✓ Have parents talk with a health professional if they have any other questions or concerns.