



Starting Family Foods

Introducing your baby
to solid foods

FOR PARENTS OF BABIES BIRTH TO 12 MONTHS

BIRTH TO AROUND 6 MONTHS

Breastmilk or infant formula only

Breastmilk is all a child needs for their first 6 months.

Developmental Stage

Can suck and swallow milk

Formula fed babies only may need to be offered cooled boiled water in times of heat stress (such as hot weather or fever).

See 1. Why Wait Until Around Six Months before Introducing Solid Foods?



AROUND 6 MONTHS

Continue breastmilk or infant formula.

Breastmilk still gives your baby important nutrients, immune system support and comfort after 6 months.

Small amounts of cooled boiled water may be offered in a cup.

Developmental Stage

Stronger suck
Shows interest in food
Begins chewing
Can swallow solids



Biting
Chewing developing
Using lips to eat from spoon
Interested in feeding self

At around 6 months most babies will be able to manage many different textures. Some babies will prefer to start with soft foods (mashed or grated) from a spoon and others will prefer to start with finger foods, such as steak strips and cut up fruit.



Foods can be offered in any order and rate, but make sure iron-rich foods (*) are included in your baby's first foods.

First foods to give your baby:

- Iron-enriched rice cereal*
- Minced, stewed or grated meat, poultry & liver (cook, freeze then grate)*
- Fish
- Cooked legumes, tofu and tempeh*
- Cooked vegetables (e.g. carrot, potato, pumpkin)
- Fruit (e.g. apple, banana, pear, melon)
- Cooked egg (yolk & white)
- Bread, pasta, toast fingers and rusks
- Nut pastes/spreads
- Full-fat cheese, custard and yoghurt

Until 12 months cow's milk should only be used in small amounts to mix with family foods and in cooking.



FROM 12 MONTHS

Keep breastfeeding for as long as you and your baby want.

Breastfeeding continues to be healthy for your baby in their second year of life and beyond. However, solid foods should provide more of your baby's energy from 12 months.

Developmental Stage

- Developed chewing movement

- Jaw control

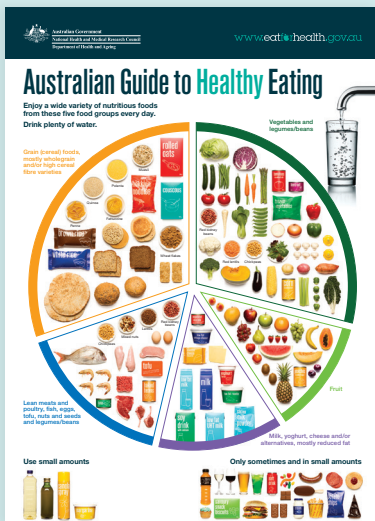
- Most children should be eating family foods and drinking from a cup by 12 months.

From 12 months full cream cow's milk can be offered from a cup.

If you want your baby to grow up on a plant-based diet (vegan diet) keep breastfeeding for as long as you can, and see a Dietitian for advice on iron and B12 supplementation.

Toddler follow-on milks are not necessary.

A variety of nutritious foods from the Five Food Groups is recommended. These are outlined in the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating: <https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines/australian-guide-healthy-eating>



1. WHY WAIT UNTIL AROUND 6 MONTHS BEFORE INTRODUCING SOLID FOODS?

Both the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) *Infant Feeding Guidelines* (2012) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) *Exclusive Breastfeeding Statement* (2011) recommend introducing solid foods at around 6 months.

There are no benefits to starting solids foods before around 6 months.

Introducing solid foods too early can cause problems such as:

- less breastmilk production
- more exposure to germs
- issues for your baby's kidneys
- constipation, from poor digestion

If you feel your baby needs to start solids before 6 months of age, talk to your local Child and Family Health Nurse or General Practitioner. [See 9. 'Further information'](#).



2. THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN INTRODUCING SOLID FOODS

First foods can be introduced in any order and at a rate that suits your baby, as long as iron-rich foods (*) are included. *See 'Around 6 months' for information about iron-rich foods.*

Breast or bottle-feed your baby first. Breastmilk or formula is still the most important part of your baby's diet until around 12 months.

At first, solid foods are 'extras' that give your baby new tastes and eating practice.

Many babies will eat only a very small amount to start with (less than ½ teaspoon). Others may want more.

Mothers often find that a good time of day to start is when their baby is not too tired or too hungry.



Babies have very sensitive taste buds at this stage and don't need salt, sugar or fat added to their food.

Some babies may not like the taste of new foods at first. They may need to try foods many times before they learn to like them.

Avoid foods with high levels of saturated fat, sugar, or salt (e.g. cakes, biscuits, lollies, chocolate and potato chips).

3. SAFE FOOD HANDLING AND HYGIENE

Babies can easily get sick from food poisoning:

1. Wash your hands with warm running water and soap before preparing food for your baby or feeding your baby.
2. Clean all food preparation areas before and after preparing food. Always use clean utensils.
3. If preparing formula, sterilise bottles and other equipment.
4. Wash fruit and vegetables well, even vegetables you peel and cook.
5. Label and date food you put in the fridge or freezer. Prepared food can be stored in the main part of the fridge for up to 48 hours. Hot food can be put straight into the fridge.
6. Thaw frozen food in the fridge, not on the bench (at room temperature). Defrost in the microwave if you are going to use the food straight away.
7. Check the temperature of the food by tasting it with a clean spoon. Use another clean spoon to feed your baby. Don't put your baby's food in your mouth then give it to your baby.
8. Once food has been warmed and offered to your baby, throw out any left in the bowl.
9. It is important to realise that 'off' food can look, smell and taste OK. 'If in doubt, throw it out'.

Eating safely

As babies are more likely to choke on food than an adult, it is important:

- to watch them while they are eating
- not to let them move around while they are eating
- to use a safety harness when your baby is in a high chair or low chair
- to not give them nuts, small hard foods (such as raw or undercooked pieces of hard fruit and vegetables, popcorn, rice cakes and cocktail frankfurts) and small slippery foods (such as whole grapes and whole cherry tomatoes)

If you mix water with baby foods, boil and cool it first. After heating food, always mix it well and test its temperature before offering it to your baby.

4. FINGER FOODS

Babies will begin to actively explore their world and this is a great time to take advantage of their growing interest in food.

Babies need to practice before they can eat family foods. Offer lots of different foods for your baby to practice eating, in different sizes and textures. Exploring, holding and chewing food helps babies to enjoy eating and develop social skills.

Babies like foods that they can pick up with their hands and eat by themselves. Wash your baby's hands with warm soapy water first.

Tips

1. Boiled or steamed vegetables – potato, pumpkin, carrot circles, zucchini strips, beans, peas or slices of beetroot. Hard vegetables need to be well cooked and offered as large chunks.
2. Raw foods – whole small banana, tomato slices, a small ripe pear, a small whole orange, peeled.
3. Cooked lean meat may be cut into strips for chewing or small thin pieces to be picked up with the thumb and forefinger.

- Remember eating needs to be a safe and enjoyable activity.
- Always stay with your baby while they are eating.
- Eating is a great time for you and your baby to talk and connect.
- Eat healthy meals together. You are your baby's best role model!



This picture shows the different food textures and types babies can start eating from around 6 months. The amount of food your baby eats will depend on how much practice they've had and how hungry they are.

For more information about giving finger foods, talk to a Child and Family Health Nurse.

5. COMMERCIAL BABY FOODS

These can be useful, **but**:

- They are more expensive than home cooked foods.
- They may look, taste and smell different from family foods. This means babies won't learn as much about the foods the rest of the family eats.
- Babies may not want to change to family foods if they eat too many commercial foods.
- Babies won't learn as much about food (look, smell, texture and feel) if they have too many 'squeezy' food pouches. Too much sucking from these pouches can cause tooth decay and affect speech development.

Home prepared food can be just as convenient. Food can be cooked, mashed and frozen in ice cube trays for single serves.

Many food products marketed for babies (e.g. baby custards/yoghurts/pureed fruit) are no more suitable than regular products.



6. WHAT ELSE?

Sleep

It is common for children to wake once or twice per night, even into their second year. There is no evidence that introducing solids early will help your baby sleep longer at night.



Weight

Smaller babies do not need to start solids early to help them gain weight more quickly.

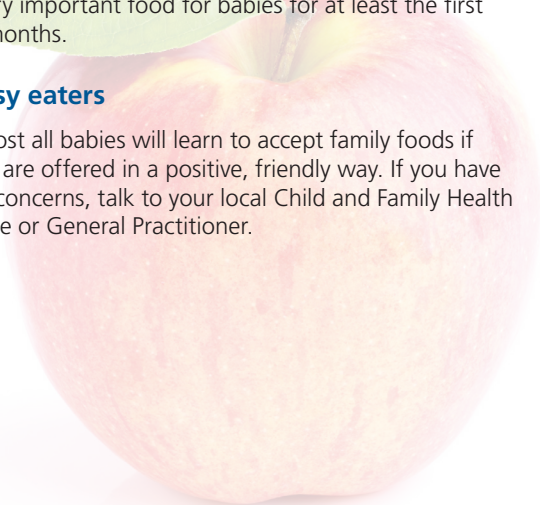
Larger babies do not need to start solids early in order to keep growing well. Breastmilk provides all the nutrients a healthy baby needs for around the first 6 months of life, whatever their size.

How much food?

All babies are different. Some love eating and it will take longer for others to want more than just a taste. If you keep offering lots of different healthy foods, your baby will eat as much as they need. Remember, milk is still a very important food for babies for at least the first 12 months.

Fussy eaters

Almost all babies will learn to accept family foods if they are offered in a positive, friendly way. If you have any concerns, talk to your local Child and Family Health Nurse or General Practitioner.



7. UNSUITABLE FOODS

Honey:

Can have bacteria in it which can cause severe illness (botulism) in infants under 12 months old.

Nuts:

Babies can choke on nuts and other small, hard foods. Nut pastes and spreads can be offered from 6 months.

Tea:

Can reduce your baby's ability to absorb iron and other important nutrients.

Fruit juice:

Offers no health benefits to babies under 12 months. Eating whole fruit is best.

Cow's Milk:

Is not recommended as baby's main milk until after 12 months. Use breastmilk or infant formula.

Milk from other animal sources:

E.g. goat's and sheep's milk, is not recommended as there are differences in protein and electrolyte levels.

Low fat and reduced fat milks:

Are not recommended for children under 2 years. After 2 years of age children can drink reduced fat milks (e.g. lite or light milks). After 5 years of age children can drink low fat milk (e.g. skim milk).

Plant-based milks:

E.g. soy, rice, oat, coconut, and almond milks, do not provide enough nutrition for babies under 12 months. Children can have calcium-enriched soy, rice and oat drinks after 12 months if this has been discussed with a Dietitian.

Caffeinated and sugar-sweetened drink:

Do not offer babies coffee or sugar sweetened drinks (e.g. soft drinks, cordials, energy drinks).

Originally developed by Nutrition Services and Central Coast Kids and Families, Central Coast Local Health District, in partnership with the Australian Breastfeeding Association and mothers of the Central Coast. The information in this leaflet is intended as a general guide for parents of healthy full term babies. For more copies of this pamphlet visit: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/heal/Pages/Starting-Family-Foods.aspx>.

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8. ALLERGIES

Solid foods can be offered in any order and rate, as long as iron-rich foods are offered first.

If allergies are a problem in your family seek advice from a health professional. The following foods are more commonly associated with allergies in babies: milk, eggs, seafood/fish, nuts, tree nuts, sesame, soy and wheat. There is no need to delay introduction of these foods after 6 months, unless advised by a Doctor or Dietitian.

9. FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information:

Child Health and Family Services:

For service locations throughout NSW,
visit: www.health.nsw.gov.au.

Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA):

Breastfeeding Helpline 1800 686 268
www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Tresillian 24-hour Parents Helpline:

(02) 9787 0855 or 1800 637 357
(free call outside Sydney metropolitan area)
www.tresillian.net

Karitane Care Line:

1300 227 464 or (02) 9794 2350
www.karitane.org.au

**Mothersafe. Medications in Pregnancy
and Lactation Service:**

Phone: (02) 9382 6539 or 1800 647 848
(free call outside Sydney metropolitan area)

Personal Health Record (known as the 'Blue Book'):

www.health.nsw.gov.au

References:

- *Infant Feeding Guidelines* NHMRC 2012
- *Exclusive Breastfeeding Statement* WHO 2011
- *Australian Dietary Guidelines* NHMRC 2013