



# STARTING SOLIDS

THE FUN AND THE MESSY

## WHEN TO START

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends starting solid foods around 6 months of age. Babies are ready to start eating solids when they can sit up with help, have good control of their head and neck, put toys or hands in their mouths, and show an interest in food by leaning forward and opening their mouth when it's time to eat.

## FEEDING CULTURE

Babies should be seated for all meals. This prevents choking and having to follow your child around the house with a spoon full of peas. Feeding should be social. Start family meals from the first feeding. Having a family dinner on a regular basis has been shown to have a positive effect on a child's development. It is important to offer your child a variety of foods. If your child does not seem to like a food, don't force it on them but do offer it during subsequent meals. Avoid asking your child if they like a food they are trying. If they like it, you will know and asking the question makes them think they have the option of not eating it or think that they only have to eat foods they like.

## FOODS TO AVOID

Babies under 1 year of age cannot drink cow's milk and cannot eat honey (due to the risk of botulism). While spices can be added, children under 1 year of age should not have salt added to their food due to their immature kidneys.

Before 6 months of age, limit foods with a large amount of nitrates (spinach, beets, carrots, green beans, squash). Children under 4 years of age should not have foods that are choking hazards, including hot dogs, peanuts and other nuts (but can have peanut butter), grapes, raw carrots (including baby carrots), popcorn, and hard candy.

## GETTING STARTED

- Start with a food that has only one ingredient and is mashed up well. Rice cereal, fruits, (pureed apples, pears, mashed bananas) and vegetables (avocado) are all favorite starters.
- You can mix baby cereal with breast milk, formula or water. Your baby will prefer a very thin mixture at first with mostly liquid.
- Feed your baby with a spoon; do not put the rice cereal in a bottle.
- Try a new food every 3-5 days. That way if your baby begins to have a reaction to a food, we know which one it is. If your baby has any of these symptoms, let your doctor know: skin rash or raised, red patches of skin that are usually very itchy (hives); swollen lips or face; vomiting or diarrhea; coughing or trouble breathing; pale skin.
- If you make your own baby food, do not add sugar or salt to it. Not only do babies not need it, it can be harmful to them. If you use jarred baby food, be sure to follow the instructions about how long the food keeps after the jar is opened. Most keep for 2-3 days after it is opened and should be thrown out if opened for more than 3 days.

## MOVING ON FROM THE BASICS

- Once your baby has tried a variety of foods, you can move on to foods with 2 or more ingredients as long as your baby has safely eaten all of the ingredients before.
- Over time your baby will enjoy thicker and chunkier foods.
- If your baby is exclusively breast fed, consider early introduction of meat to provide them with extra iron and zinc. Single grain iron fortified cereals (rice, oatmeal, and wheat) are also common first foods.
- Keep in mind that meats and vegetables tend to be more nutrient rich than fruits and grains. Additionally, citrus fruits and berries tend to produce more acidic irritation on the "way out".
- By one year old, your baby should be enjoying three meals a day including breastmilk/formula, meats, fish, eggs, vegetables, and fruit.

## MOST IMPORTANTLY

- Have fun! You are starting your child out on a lifetime adventure of new and exciting foods and tastes. Don't stress if she hates broccoli the first 40 times or if he is really interested in food one day and refuses the next. Be patient, keep introducing new foods even if they are met with resistance initially, and keep meal times light hearted. Remember, you can choose when and what to offer your child but the eating part is out of your hands.