Tenafly Pediatrics

Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine

Starting solid foods with your infant

Infants can be started on solid foods between four and six months of age. Clues to their readiness include if he/she can hold his or her head up well, can open his mouth when food comes her way, and can move food from the spoon to his/her throat. Traditionally, the first food group given is cereal, particularly baby oatmeal--mixed with breast milk or formula--as it is hypoallergenic and a good source of iron, but actually you can start with fruits and vegetables as well.

Start with one meal per day—any time of day that works for you is fine—and over a few weeks you can work your way up to two meals per day

Start with a teaspoonful and then work your way up to a few tablespoons of food. Start out with a runny consistency and thicken the food as the infant is ready. Start slowly and let the baby determine how much to eat at first. Never use a bottle to feed cereal. Use an infant spoon only.

Once your baby has learned to eat one food, gradually give him other foods. Give your baby one new food at a time. It may take introducing a new food five to ten times for the baby to take a liking to it, so be patient. And don't worry about the mess! Watch for any reactions such as diarrhea, rash, or vomiting to any new foods. If that occurs, consult your doctor.

Within a few months of starting solid foods your baby's diet should consist of a variety of foods that may include breast milk or formula, cereal, fruits, vegetables, meats, smooth peanut butter, eggs, and fish. There is no evidence that introducing these foods after four to six months of age will increase your child's risk of being allergic to them. If your family has a strong history of food allergies, especially to nuts, you should consult your doctor before starting those foods.

We recommend waiting to offer whole milk until your child is at least a year old. Honey should definitely be withheld until after your child's first birthday.

Finger Foods

Once your baby can sit up and bring his hands or other objects to his mouth (traditionally nine months, but it can be earlier), you can give him finger foods to help him learn to feed himself. Make sure anything you offer is soft, easy to swallow, and cut into small pieces. Examples include: small pieces of banana, wafer-type cookies or crackers, scrambled eggs, well cooked pasta, well cooked and finely chopped chicken, peas, and potatoes.

Avoid foods that are choking risks, such as hot dogs, nuts and seeds, chunks of meat or cheese, whole grapes, popcorn, raw vegetables, fruit chunks, and hard candies.

By nine months, your baby should be up to three meals per day. Let the process of infant feeding be fun. It is an exploration of tastes and textures for your child, and if approached correctly, infant feeding can be a rewarding experience for both parent and child.