

Super Baby Food Book Sample Chapter:

Your Super Baby's Very First Meal of Solid Foods

It's Time to Start Solid Foods!

One day you just know it's time to start. Your pediatrician has given you the OK and together you have decided on the food that will be the first, and there's some ready and waiting in your kitchen. The suggestions below will help make your baby's very first meal a pleasant experience.

The Best Time of Day for the Very First Meal

The best time to give your baby her very first meal is in the morning or early afternoon. Sometimes babies have allergic reactions to foods. If you feed her in the evening, and she does have a reaction, it will probably occur in the middle of the night. It is better for you, the parent, if you don't have to comfort a gassy baby at 2am, while you're tired and half asleep.

REMEMBER: Here is a sleep saving tip. Always introduce *any new food* to your baby at breakfast or lunch, never supper. If he has an allergic reaction, it is less likely to occur in the middle of the night.

There is another reason why you should feed your baby during the earlier part of the day. It is usually a time when your baby (and you!) is not tired or colicky, as he may be toward evening. We want everybody happy and energetic when your baby has his first special meal. Choose a time when your baby is not tired, fussy, or cranky, such as after his morning nap.

Give Your Baby His Very First Meal When He is Not Too Hungry

Yes, when he is not too hungry. He should be hungry enough to want to eat, but not ravenous. A too-hungry baby urgently wanting to eat may become frustrated during this new unfamiliar eating method, with this strange contraption called a spoon. Feed him his very first meal after he has had a *partial* breast or bottle feeding. Give him half a feeding, then introduce his first solid food, and then finish the feeding. Giving him a partial feeding will also help to maintain his milk intake. Or you can give him his first solid food halfway through the time between two breast or bottle feedings, when he's just a little hungry.

The High Chair

Safety First. Thousands of children are injured each year because of careless practices with high chairs, so please read the warnings in this section carefully.

WARNING: Never leave your baby alone in a high chair. High chairs are safe only when an adult is present to make sure that our energetic babies don't try any acrobatics while seated in them.

There's now exists a vast array of high chairs on the market. Make sure that the chair you buy is certified safe by the Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association (JPMA). Safety should be your first criterion in choosing a high chair. Pick one with a wide base for stability. Before buying a chair, shake it and push it sideways to see just how much it takes to tip it over.

WARNING: Don't allow your older children to play in baby's high chair. Their weight may tip the chair over, causing injury.

A Crotch Strap. The high chair should also have a crotch strap to prevent your baby from sliding out the bottom (please read page 44 for possible dangers). Some babies love to slither down slowly until they are under the tray, while others prefer a rapid chute. If you've inherited a chair without a crotch strap, place a flat piece of foam under him or glue non-stick bathtub appliqués onto the seat.

The Tray. Choose a high chair with a removable tray, so that you can take it to the sink and give it a good washing. If you can remove the tray with only one hand, all the better. The tray should have a raised lip around the edge to stop inevitable spills from getting to the floor or baby's lap. The lip may also help prevent baby from pushing food pieces and dishes off the tray and onto the floor, although I wouldn't count on it. The tray also should be removable so that the chair can move to the family table when your baby gets older. Make sure the instructions say that the chair is safe at a full-sized adult table without its tray.

WARNING: After your baby is seated, always make sure that the tray is securely locked into position. An unlocked tray is a danger to your baby. I always give the tray a good forward yank to verify that it's locked in place.

REMEMBER: Get into the habit of knowing where tiny fingers are *before* you slide the tray onto the high chair so that you don't accidentally pinch them. Always give a quick look before you close anything: high chair trays, car doors, house doors, cabinets, chair recliners, lawn chairs, etc. Odds are that this quick check habit, which takes only a second, will eventually save your child pain and injury.

Plan on spending some time in the store when you shop for a high chair. Remove each high chair's tray and see which feels easiest and best to you. You shouldn't have to peer under the tray to find the catch to remove it--it should be easily found by touch.

Comfort. If you have your baby with you, and she is willing, test her in your favorite chair before you buy it. She'll let you know if she doesn't like it!

If your baby looks uncomfortable in a high chair, as is common with babies younger than 6 or 7 months, place him in your lap in an upright position to feed him his first meals. Move him to the high chair when he gets a little older and is sitting well without support.

MONEY SAVER: Some high chairs recline to an infant seat-type angle, an expensive option that is useful for a very short time. If he's uncomfortable in a high chair and your lap, why not just use your infant seat until he's older? Remember to always strap him in securely and never place the seat on a chair or table because it can fall off and cause your baby serious injury. Place the infant seat on the floor and sit on the floor next to him to feed him. He can't fall off the floor!

WARNING: Your baby should be seated in an upright position, whether it be in the high chair, an infant seat, or your lap, in order to prevent choking during eating. Don't let an older baby crawl around with a cracker or other food, as she may lie facing upward and choke.

Cleanability. Avoid high chairs with intricate carvings, which only serve to gather hardened glop. Your baby's high chair will eventually become a modern art piece of crusty layers of dried food. To clean it, take it in the bathtub (place rags under the legs to prevent scratches in the tub) and give it a shower massage with an old vegetable brush or toothbrush. Or use the hose outside on a nice warm sunny day, or take it to the carwash and blast it with the pressure hose. First cover any cracks in the cushioned seat with duct tape, so that the inside foam doesn't become a water-logged sponge.

TIP: For those really dried on food splatters, lay a wet towel or sponge on them for an hour or so, and they'll wipe right off. If food is dried around the arms of the chair or in corner crevices, take a dripping wet rag and drape it or tie it around the hard to reach dried food. Let it sit for a few hours and then use an old toothbrush to scrub out the softened food.

WARNING: Make sure that wall mountings, electrical outlets, and objects on counter tops are out of baby's reach from the high chair. Also, your baby should not be able to grab something and use it for leverage to tip the chair over.

Other Feeding Chairs

There are other types of chairs for the purpose of feeding babies--feeding tables, legless hook-on-table chairs, and booster seats. Let's get booster seats out of the running immediately. I don't recommend them for toddlers (and they are not made for babies) because most of these seats don't attach to the chair onto which they are placed. Children can easily fall off the chair, with or without the booster seat.

If you want to purchase only one feeding chair, a high chair is probably your best bet and most economical choice because of its long lifetime. A high chair can be used for years if you move it to the family table when your child gets older, which cannot be done with a feeding table. One advantage, however, of feeding tables is the fact that they are safer than high chairs because they will probably never tip over. But, it is more difficult to maneuver your child in and out of them.

Hook-on-table seats are also second to high chairs in maneuverability, and, more importantly, you cannot sit directly in front of your baby for face-to-face interaction during mealtime. These seats must be clipped onto a firm, strong table. Never attach the seat to table's extension leaf. And make sure your child's feet cannot reach a table leg--he may be able to kick and loosen the seat from the table.

WARNING: If you are going to use a hook-on-table seat, never place an adult chair under it to "give it a safety net." This practice actually causes accidents! Your baby may push on the adult chair, which decreases her weight on the hook-on seat. Your baby's weight is part of the cantilever system of the hook-on seat and is necessary to keep the seat firmly clipped to the table.

REMEMBER: If you have any question about the safety of a feeding chair or just about any product--from vinyl mini-blinds to portable cribs--remember that you can call the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) at 1-800-638-2772. You can also call that number to report an unsafe product.

The Feeding Area

Set up a feeding area in your home where you will feed your baby most of the time. Babies like stability and predictability. She'll know just what's coming if you feed her in the same high chair in the same corner of the kitchen each day.

Make the feeding area as comfortable for you as it is for your baby. Place your chair in front of your baby's feeding chair so that you can be face-to-face with him, to chat and smile at him as he eats. Feeding time will become another pleasant bonding time for the two of you. It's very nurturing to give food to your baby, as it is to breast or bottle feed him.

Have a table top or counter surface within your reach and out of your baby's reach. Place on it wipe-up towels (discussed on page 150 in the *Kitchen and Baby Food Hygiene* chapter), vitamin supplements, bibs, and anything else you use during baby's mealtime.

If the floor in the feeding area is carpeted or covered with some other material that will be ruined when baby starts dropping food to the floor, protect it by covering it with something waterproof. Baby stores and catalogs also sell machine washable plastic sheets specifically for baby feeding areas. A piece of plastic tarp or an old shower curtain (by the way, shower curtains are machine washable) will work. Or you can get a leftover piece of linoleum remnant from the nearest floor covering store (ask them if it will ruin

carpeting if placed over it). If you're at Grandma's or a friend's house, rip a big plastic garbage bag at the seam so that it lays flat in one layer. Be very careful not to slip on it, because plastic garbage bags are as slick as ice. Layers of newspaper, brown paper bags from the grocery store, or even a flattened large cardboard box also can be used to temporarily protect floors.

The walls near the feeding chair should not be covered with fine velvet wallpaper; if so, protect them also. The nicest babies have been known to throw food. Walls are also threatened by the ominous full-mouthed sneeze, which has been known to project wet food as far as several feet in all directions. Practice a quick draw with a wipe-up towel to cover baby's mouth when you suspect one is about to occur.

The Spoon

Baby's gums are sensitive. Instead of using a hard metal spoon that might irritate her gums, feed her with a plastic coated baby spoon. The spoon should be small so that it fits easily into baby's tiny mouth. It should also be shallow, and have no sharp edges. If you don't want to buy a special baby spoon, you can use a demitasse spoon or a small plastic disposable spoon, like the one you get with ice cream cups, or even a plastic toy spoon from your older child's toy tea set. A small wooden tongue depressor or even a popsicle stick, with any loose slivers of wood removed, will work in a pinch. Plastic coated spoons are often sold with plastic coated forks. Although your baby will not be old enough for a fork until her second year (page 109), you may save money by buying the set and stashing the fork away until later.

Do Not Use an Infant Feeder

Although first foods are very liquidy, they should not be fed to your baby through a bottle with an enlarged nipple hole, or with one of those bottle-type infant feeders, which I am surprised are still sold in baby stores. These feeders actually delay learning how to swallow, do not help in desensitizing the gag reflex, and delay the development of other eating skills. Solid foods should be given to your baby at a time when they are needed both nutritionally *and developmentally*. Nutritionally, they add calories and nutrients to your baby's milk diet. Developmentally, eating solid foods helps in the maturation of a new set of muscles in the tongue in order to swallow, which were not used in breast or bottle feeding. Proper development of these muscles help to promote clear speech patterns later in life. If your baby is not developmentally ready to eat from a spoon, then she is not yet ready for solid foods. When baby eats from a spoon, she starts becoming aware of the process of eating: taking a bite, chewing and swallowing the bite, waiting a moment before taking another bite, and stopping when satiated. Infant feeders do not allow this process and drastically increase the amount of food your baby eats, which may cause problems with overweight and bad eating habits. (The section *Mealtimes and Physical and Intellectual Development* beginning on page 66 discusses more about the learning that takes place when your baby eats.)

The Food's Temperature

Remember that your baby's mouth is much more sensitive to heat than yours is, so please do not go by how warm you like your food when heating up your baby's food. The temperature of your baby's food should be *moderately warm*. Breast-fed babies are accustomed to the temperature of breast milk, which is at body temperature. Babies will be comfortable with their first solid food if it is also at body temperature. It is not necessary, but if you wish, you can warm the food on the stove or in the microwave for a few seconds.

WARNING: Before using the microwave, read the warnings on page 44 in the section *Always Test the Temperature of Your Baby's Food*.

The Amount of Food

Give your baby just a little for her very first meal, only about a teaspoon (before it's mixed with liquid). Remember that she will not be very hungry because you will first give her half of a breast or bottle feeding. Or, if you're giving her first meal halfway between breast or bottle feedings, it will be at a time that is at least an hour before she expects her next feeding.

The Consistency of the Food

Your baby's very first "solid" food (page 18) should be so liquidy that it pours easily off the spoon into your baby's mouth. Thick food may make him gag or choke. If you're feeding him commercial rice cereal, use only a teaspoon and mix it with about 2 tablespoons of liquid. You can use water, but using breast milk or formula is more nutritious and will make the food taste more familiar to him. If you're using cooked sweet potato, ripe banana, or ripe avocado, mash or puree it until it is very smooth and there are absolutely no lumps. Then take only a teaspoonful and mix with liquid until it pours off the spoon. To yogurt, add just a little liquid. Or scoop yogurt out from the top, where that yellow-tinged watery liquid (called whey) gathers. Use the whey to liquify the yogurt until it pours off the spoon.

Bibs

We all know that babies are messy eaters. Make sure your baby dons a bib for her first meals. Actually, you'll need bibs for your baby's first few years. Cloth bibs or even wipe-up towels tucked into baby's shirt will help keep his clothes clean. Try to buy cloth bibs without tie strings, which can be strangulation hazards--look for bibs with snaps or Velcro. If you are going to invest in a plastic bib, buy a larger size so that your baby won't grow out of it in a few months. Bibs with pockets will help stop food from dropping on the chair's seat and to the floor. They now sell very heavy stiff plastic armor-like bibs that wipe clean. Keep the receipt in case your baby doesn't like the heaviness.

TIP: If your baby cries when he sees the bib coming, try this: Give him an interesting toy to distract him. While he's playing, move in back of his high chair and sneakily and deftly slip the bib on from behind.

There's nothing wrong with letting your baby eat topless on warm days--skin cleans off so easily! Or you can feed your baby non-staining foods while she is bib-less and fully clothed, if you know you're going to bathe her and change her clothes/pajamas immediately after she finishes eating (and soon afterwards pooping).

TIP: To prevent food from smearing on baby's face when you pull her dirty shirt over her head, pull her arms out of her sleeves and roll the shirt up tightly before removing.

Wipe-Up Towels

I always keep a few dozen "wipe-up towels" on hand in my kitchen. They are life savers! Please read the section on wipe-up towels on page 150 in the chapter on *Kitchen and Baby Food Hygiene*. Always keep a few wipe-up towels within arm's reach. I like to dampen a corner of the towel to clean the crusty leftovers from my baby's face. Then I use the dry part of the towel to dry him up.

TIP: Wipe the cleanest thing first and the dirtiest thing last, and then you will need only one wipe-up towel. For example, at the end of the meal, wipe your baby's face first, her hands next, then the high chair tray and seat, and last the floor. If you've used the towel to wipe the floor first, then you'll need another clean towel to wipe her face.

TIP: If your baby acts insulted when you try to wipe his face with a towel, use your wet fingers to clean him up, and wipe your fingers instead of his face with the towel.

Get Ready

Now that everything is physically ready for baby's first meal, prepare yourself mentally. Decide that you will not be disappointed or upset if he doesn't do well with the food. Be ready to keep your facial expression pleasant, no matter what happens.

I didn't realize how important my facial expression was as a guide to my babies until one afternoon when I was sitting outside with my twin sons. Unexpectedly, a very loud crack of thunder sounded, and this was a new noise to my sons. They both immediately looked questioningly at my face to see if they should be afraid. When I looked at them and smiled, they were quite relieved and returned the smile. Since then, we love thunderstorms. The point to remember is to smile at baby's meal times. If your face looks anxious, your baby will be anxious, and mealtimes will turn out to be anxiety producing.

Even a baby can see through feigned calmness. I smiled at my sons through an entire commuter flight in a plane the size of a phone booth. My sons didn't fall for it, and they watched me worriedly the whole time. Don't fake it. Be determined beforehand that you will not get frustrated if baby refuses to eat or spits food at you, and then you won't have to pretend.

REMEMBER: The more relaxed, confident, and tolerant you are at mealtime, the smoother the feeding will go.

Get Set, Go!

Your baby and you are both seated comfortably and you have a pleasant expression on your face. You have just finished giving her half a breast or bottle feeding and she is still hungry. It's time to go. Put a pea-sized amount of the liquidy food on the spoon, no more than a teaspoon. Place the spoon lightly on your baby's lower lip and slip it gently into her mouth, so that it's on top of her tongue. Let her suck the food off the spoon. If she doesn't, then tip the spoon slightly so that the food pours slowly into your baby's mouth. You may also want to try placing the food a little farther back on her tongue, because of her tendency to thrust her tongue forward. Be careful not to gag her.

Whatever Happens, Smile and Say "Mmmmm!!!!"

Remember that this is a first time for your baby. Don't show disappointment if she thrusts her tongue forward and seems to spit out the food--remember the extrusion reflex (page 14). The younger she is, the longer it will take her to learn to swallow. The closer she is to 6 months, the better she will do. If she is spitting out the food, gently scrape it off her chin with the spoon and re-feed it to her. Continue to feed her as long as she wants to cooperate. Smile and talk to your baby while she is eating. Keep feeding her until the food is done or until she turns her head away or closes her little mouth when she sees the spoon coming. Then offer her a little water (see below) and the rest of her breast or bottle feeding.

If she doesn't handle the spoon well or if she seems at all uncomfortable, put the food away and wait a few days before trying to feed her again. Remember that your baby's health will not suffer if she doesn't start eating solid foods today. Take it slowly and never push her to eat. You want your baby to look forward to her meals as relaxing and enjoyable times with you. After a few days, try feeding her again, keeping things relaxed and pleasant. If she still has problems, discuss your concerns with your pediatrician.

Water

When your baby begins eating solid foods, it increases the load on the kidneys and necessitates the addition of water to your baby's diet. Please read about water on page 58.

What to Do with the Leftovers

If leftover food has come in contact with your baby's saliva, because the spoon from your baby's mouth has been dipped into it, throw the food away. The enzymes in your baby's saliva will continue digesting the food in the bowl, breaking down the vital nutrients and causing it to begin to spoil. Please read more about handling baby's food and leftovers on page 153.

WARNING: Do not keep baby food, either opened commercial jars or homemade, in the refrigerator for more than 2 days. Baby food can be spoiled without necessarily smelling bad.

If you are using avocado or banana as baby's first food, you will have plenty of leftovers. You can always eat the rest of the banana yourself, but even an adult has trouble finishing a whole avocado minus one teaspoon!

One method that will help prevent leftovers and food waste is the Frozen Food Cube Method. The method is explained in detail in Part II of this book, but very briefly you would: puree or fork-mash a very ripe avocado, spoon portions into the cubes of an ice cube tray, cover with aluminum foil to prevent freezer burn and nutrient loss, freeze until solid, and transfer the frozen food cubes into a plastic freezer bag. When mealtime comes, thaw a food cube or two in the microwave (following the precautions in Part II) and feed it to your baby. The Food Cube Method can be used for cooked pureed sweet potatoes and almost all other Super Baby Foods.

MONEY SAVER: Don't cook large amounts of a new food until you know that your baby likes it and will eat it.

Mealtime Should Be a Fun Time!

Feeding with Love

Your baby's feeding area should be a happy place to be! You will be spending a lot of time feeding your baby in the next few years. Try not to look at baby's mealtime as a chore. Rather, use it as a quality time for bonding with your beautiful baby. Spoon feeding your baby will then make you feel very loving and nurturing towards your baby, and she will become closer to you as she did when you breast or bottle feed her. During your baby's first year she should develop a sense of trust, and relaxed mealtimes are a large part of the process. If her first experiences with food are within an atmosphere of tension and frustration, eating problems may develop that may last a lifetime. Your baby will actually grow and develop better if she is fed in a loving environment than one that is emotionally negative. As you can see, **feeding your baby involves so much more than food**. Please read the section *Mealtimes and Physical and Intellectual Development* beginning on page 66.

Entertainment with Dinner

Make silly faces at your baby, smile, and talk to her during mealtime. Do the classic "airplane into the hangar" routine. Sing her songs. My baby's favorite is "How Much Is That Doggie in the Window?" because I go "WOOF! WOOF!" between phrases. (My older boys have asked me to refrain from doing this when they have friends over.) However, you should not drag out baby's mealtimes beyond a 20-30 minute limit. The high chair's main purpose should be meal eating, and not entertainment.

If your baby gets antsy while you're getting her food ready, give her some finger food to keep her busy. Or place an interesting toy on her high chair, one that she doesn't get to play with at other times, and that will endure crashing to the floor after hundreds of throws off the high chair tray.

Poop Panic!

Your baby's bowel movements (now a major part of your life) will change considerably when he starts eating solid foods. They will have a stronger odor, and they may also take on the color of the food eaten several hours before. My baby's first post-beet poop looked so much like blood I almost went into a panic. Beets and beet greens cause the most severe color change, followed by kale and the other greens. You may also notice orange veggies, like carrots, at the other end too. Beets may also cause red urine, although this is not as common. And, asparagus sometimes lends a strong "fragrance" to a baby's urine.

Your baby's stool may also contain undigested foods. For example, you may see in your baby's diaper the little black seeds from kiwi fruit, which will pass unscathed through your young baby's digestive tract. Sometimes undigested foods are accompanied by small quantities of mucus, especially when your baby starts feeding himself more textured foods. You probably have no cause to be concerned, but it's a good idea to discuss it with your pediatrician.

WARNING: If your baby's stool becomes loose and watery and contain mucus, inform your pediatrician. Your baby's digestive tract might be irritated from a food that he has been eating. You may have to temporarily reduce his solid food intake, especially the suspect food.

WARNING: Too much fruit juice or even too much fresh fruit can cause your baby's stool to be acidic. This irritates baby's tender skin and may cause a painful, bright-red diaper rash that hurts when you wipe. Inform your pediatrician.

REMEMBER: Remember to keep your facial expression pleasant when you are changing your baby's diaper. (With some poops, this may be a real challenge!) He will notice any look of disgust on your face, which may teach him that his private parts are repulsive and lead him to believe that sex is "dirty" when he gets older.