

## Super Baby Food Book Sample Chapter:

# Starting Solids: What Age? Which Food First? How Much? What Consistency?

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### When Should I Start Feeding My Baby Solid Foods?

The answer is: when your pediatrician tells you that it's OK to start solid foods. She will probably agree with the American Academy of Pediatrics, whose guidelines state that the best time to begin feeding your baby solid foods is between 4 and 6 months of age. And the closer to 6 months the better, especially if you are breastfeeding. Your baby's body in its first few months was designed to digest breast milk, or something similar to it. And, calorie for calorie, no solid food has the nutritional quality of breast milk or formula for your young baby. If you feed your baby solid foods too early, her milk intake may decrease. You'd be replacing milk, the best food for your baby, with foods that are nutritionally inferior and not as digestible. Solid foods should not *replace* breast milk, they should *complement* it.

#### Why You Should Wait Until At Least 4 Months

Your baby is not physically ready to eat solid foods until he is around 4 months old. Although your mother or grandmother will strongly disagree, saying that she gave her babies solids when they were only 2 weeks old, there are several reasons to wait at least 4 months before starting your baby on solid foods.

**Reason 1.** Your baby's digestive system is too immature for solid foods before 4 months. Although he can suck very well, he does not have a lot of saliva to help digest food. Until he is at least 3-4 months old, his system lacks certain digestive enzymes, such as an enzyme called *amylase*, needed for digesting cereals (starches or complex carbohydrates). His body has trouble digesting some fats before he is 6 months old. Some foods will pass through him undigested and end up in his diaper. And some high protein foods, like eggs, meat, and even cow's milk, given too early may cause problems with your baby's immature kidneys.

**Reason 2.** Your baby is not developmentally ready to eat solid foods. His throat muscles are not developed enough to swallow solid foods until he is at least 4 months old. And, it is not until about 4 months that he is able to use his tongue to transfer food from the front to the back of his mouth. In fact, when you touch his tongue, he reacts by pushing his tongue outward or forward. This response is called the *extrusion reflex* or the *tongue-thrust reflex* and it doesn't disappear until he is around 16-18 weeks old. The first time you feed him with a spoon, it may seem that he is spitting out the food and closing his

mouth at the wrong time. But his tongue movement is simply the result of the not-yet-unlearned extrusion reflex and not because he doesn't want the food. It is not until he is about 5 months old that he will see the spoon coming and open his mouth in anticipation.

**Reason 3.** Your baby must have a way of telling you that he is satiated. He lets you know that he is finished breast or bottle feeding by stopping his sucking or by falling asleep. But until he becomes able to turn his head to refuse food, which occurs at around 4 or 5 months, he has no way of letting you know he has had enough solid food. Because of this inability, some people consider feeding solid foods to a too-young baby a method of force feeding. This practice can interfere with the body's self-regulating eating mechanism and lead to overweight later in life. As with adults, your baby should eat only when he is hungry.

**Reason 4.** Beginning solid foods too early has been associated with other problems later in life, such as obesity, respiratory problems like bronchial asthma, and food allergies. For more information on how food allergies are caused by too-early introduction of solid foods, see page 33.

**Reason 5.** Solid foods will not make your baby sleep through the night. Studies show that of all babies sleep through at 3 months of age, whether or not they are eating solid foods. Even if solid foods will help your baby sleep longer, that is still not a good reason to begin solid foods early. I know sleep deprivation is hell, and most of us have been there. Hang in there. One night he'll sleep right through, and then you can start feeling normal again.

**Reason 6.** If you are breastfeeding and give your baby solid foods too early, your milk production may be decreased.

### **Don't Wait Longer than 8 Months**

After six months, your baby begins to need solid foods for some nutrients, such as iron, vitamin C, protein, carbohydrates, zinc, water, and calories, and delaying food may cause delayed growth. Besides playing a nutritional role, solid foods help your baby developmentally, as discussed under the section *Do Not Use an Infant Feeder* on page 24. It is crucial that your baby start developing eating and chewing skills between the ages of 7 to 9 months. And if you delay the introduction of solid foods past 8 or 9 months, your baby may refuse textured foods when you finally do offer them to her.

### **Signs of Readiness for Solid Foods**

Your pediatrician looks for certain signs of readiness in your baby before advising you to begin solid foods. Some of these signs are:

- She is at least 4 months old.
- She weighs twice as much as her birth weight.
- She weighs at least 13-15 pounds.

- She can sit with support, allowing her to lean forward when she wants another spoonful and backward to refuse.
- She has control over her head and neck muscles and can turn her head to refuse food.
- She has stopped exhibiting the extrusion reflex when you put a spoon in her mouth.
- She is drinking at least 32-40 ounces of formula per 24-hours and still wants more.
- She is breast feeding at least 8-10 times per 24-hours (after the first few weeks), empties both breasts at each feeding, and still wants more.
- The time between feedings becomes shorter and shorter over a period of several days.
- She can bring an object in her hand directly to her mouth.
- She shows interest in others eating around her.
- She becomes fussy in the middle of the night, whereas before she slept through with no problem. Or her sleep periods are becoming shorter instead of longer.

### **Baby Food Mathematics**

The signs of readiness for solid foods tend to occur around the same time in your baby's life because of a few simple mathematical facts about calories and your baby's body weight. (Math phobes may skip the next paragraph.)

The average baby needs about 50 calories per day per pound of body weight. Breast milk and formula provide about 20 calories per ounce. Therefore, for every pound of body weight, your baby requires about 2 ounces of milk. At 13 pounds, your baby needs about 650 calories or about 32 ounces of milk. So you see, it's no happenstance that the signs of readiness coincide.

### **Which Food Should Be First?**

The first foods you should feed your baby are those that are easily digested and least likely to trigger an allergic reaction. Opinions vary, but the most often recommended first food is commercial iron-enriched baby rice cereal. Other popular first foods are avocado, sweet potato, ripe banana, and if your baby is older, millet cereal and yogurt. You and your pediatrician should decide which food should be given to your baby at her very first meal.

#### **Commercial Rice Cereal**

Commercial iron-fortified baby rice cereal is the first choice of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Rice is very easily digested, is rarely an allergen, and thins readily when added to liquid. Most commercial cereals are refined and processed. Earth's Best is not--it is made from whole brown rice and is organic. If you wish to use commercial baby cereal, I highly recommend Earth's Best. Find it at some supermarkets, all natural foods stores, or order from some baby product catalogs or from mail order natural foods

companies (page 134). Store opened boxes of cereal in a cool, dry place for up to 1 month. After 1 month, the cereal's nutrient content begins to decrease.

### Homemade Whole Grain Cereals

If your baby is at least 6 months old, I recommend homemade whole grain brown rice or millet cereal as baby's first food. These cereals are easily digested and have a naturally high iron content. Please read about iron supplements on page 64. However, your baby must be at least 6 months old before he has the necessary digestive juices to handle the complex carbohydrates in these cereals. Instructions on how to prepare and store homemade whole grain cereals (Super Porridge) begin on page 190 in Part II.

### Banana

Mashed ripe banana is an excellent first food for baby. As discussed on page 360, bananas are nutritious and very easy for your baby to digest. Many other cultures use banana exclusively as their first baby food. However, I have to mention that some experts caution that the sweet taste of bananas may give your baby a "sweet tooth" and cause him to refuse less sweet tasting foods later. I personally wouldn't be concerned about that. My baby started on bananas and he now happily eats brewer's yeast! If you've ever tasted brewer's yeast you know what I mean.

**WARNING:** Some experts recommend against feeding a young baby bananas because of the fungicides with which they (and all other imported fruits) are sprayed. Banana skins are porous, allowing the fungicides to be absorbed into the flesh. Try to buy only certified organically-grown bananas.

### Avocado

Mashed ripe avocado is also an excellent first food for baby. They are so nutritious that some claim humans can live on them exclusively. Avocados are also an excellent source of the unsaturated fatty acids that your baby needs for brain development. See page 359 for more information on avocados.

### Cooked Sweet Potato

Cooked mashed sweet potato is another favorite first food. It is highly nutritious and rich in beta-carotene (vitamin A). This is a great first food for your 4-month old baby, if you don't wish to start her out on sweet bananas or a processed baby cereal. Sweet potatoes are discussed in detail on page 390.

### Yogurt

Yogurt is similar tasting to milk, and for this reason and many others, it is a good first food for babies who are at least 5 or 6 months old. Whole milk yogurt is recommended, because your baby needs fats. Baby yogurt, of course, should be of the plain variety.

Don't buy the yogurt with sugary fruit added or, worse yet, the yogurt that has artificial sweetener. It is important to note that although yogurt may be given to a baby younger than 1 year old, cow's milk should not. If allergies to milk run in your family, you shouldn't feed your baby yogurt. Talk to your pediatrician. Milk allergy and lactose intolerance are discussed in more detail on page 36. There is more information on yogurt, including how to save lots of money by making your own (it's easy!), in the appendix on page 401.

### **The Consistency of the First Solid Food is Not!**

"Solid" is a misnomer--to eat foods that are actually solid, your baby would need a good set of teeth, which she won't have for quite some time! Your baby's first food, after breast milk or formula, should be more liquid than solid. In fact, it should be so liquid that it pours. To get this very thin consistency, the first food should be mixed with a large proportion of breast milk, formula, or water. More about this in the section *Baby's Very First Meal* on page 25.

### **How Much Food Should I Feed My Baby At Her First Meal?**

You may be surprised at how little food you should give your baby at her first meal--no more than a teaspoon or two. The amount that she will eat at any meal depends on her age and weight, and how much liquid she is drinking. The chapter *How Much Should My Baby Eat?* gives more information on the amount of food you should feed your baby. The next section, [\*Baby's Very First Meal\*](#), gives explicit directions on how to begin feeding your baby.