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## **Your 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 that follow 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 2 A.M., while you're tired and half asleep.

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.

**REMINDER:** 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.

### **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 Food's Temperature**

Remember that your baby's mouth is much more sensitive to heat than yours, 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—body temperature, 98.6°F—and will be comfortable with their first solid food if it is also at body temperature. However, your baby does not mind cool food and heating is not really necessary, although warmed food does have more flavor. If you do wish to warm your baby's food, you can do so on the stove top.

### **The Amount of Food for Your Baby's Very 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 (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 First Solid Food is Not SOLID**

“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 off the spoon. 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. For 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 purée it until it is very smooth and has 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. Mix the whey into the yogurt to liquefy it so that it pours off the spoon.

**TIP:** If you tend to hold the bowl of baby food while you feed your baby, you may find it easier to use a coffee cup with a handle.

### **One More Thing Before You Start Feeding Your Baby**

We all know that mealtimes are important to a baby's health and physical growth and development. But before you go wielding that baby spoon, you might want to become more aware of how important mealtimes are to your baby's intellectual, psychological, and emotional development, and to her development of self-confidence and feelings of trust and security. In other words, mealtimes can mess her up in more ways than one!

### **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 she 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 keep your face pleasant 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, worried, 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.

**REMINDER:** 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 relaxed expression on your face. You have just finished giving him half a breast or bottle-feeding and he is still hungry. It's time to go! Put a pea-sized amount of the liquidy food on the spoon, no more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon. Place the spoon lightly on your baby's lower lip and slip it gently into his mouth, so that it's on top of his tongue. Let him suck the food off the spoon. If he doesn't, then tip the spoon slightly so that the food pours slowly into his mouth. You may also want to try placing the food a little farther back on his tongue, because of his tendency to thrust his tongue forward. Be careful not to gag him.

### **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—that's normal. 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. A baby who is truly ready for solid foods will, after a few tries, begin to get the hang of it and retain more of the food in her mouth than she spits out.

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.

**REMINDER:** Your baby will look adorable when he is eating, but try not to laugh when he spits out his food. It may encourage him to continue to do this after it's no longer cute.

### **Watch Carefully for Signs that You Should End the Meal**

Continue to feed her as long as she wants to cooperate. Keep feeding her until the food is gone, or until she turns her head away or closes her little mouth when she sees the spoon coming. Fussiness is also a sign that your

baby is finished eating. Never force your baby to continue eating if she does not want to. When she is finished eating, offer her a little water and the rest of her breast or bottle-feeding.

### Water

When your baby begins eating solid foods, it increases the load on the kidneys and necessitates the addition of a small amount of water to your baby's diet as long as the baby is over 6 months old.

### What to Do with the Leftovers

Whether you are using commercial jars of baby food or making homemade baby food, it is important for your baby's and family's health and safety that the "food preparer" in the home understands the basics of hygiene and bacterial contamination. Please be sure to read Chapter 31, *Baby, Kitchen and Laundry Hygiene*.

**WARNING:** Do not keep baby food—either opened commercial jars or homemade—in the refrigerator for more than 1-2 days. Baby food can be spoiled without necessarily smelling bad. If commercial infant cereal has been mixed with liquid, serve it immediately; discard any leftovers and do not use them for another meal.

**WARNING:** 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 bacteria and 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.

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 thoroughly in Part III, but very briefly you would: purée or fork-mash a very ripe avocado, spoon portions into the cubes of a stainless steel ice cube tray, cover with organic, bleach-free wax paper, then aluminum foil to prevent freezer burn and

nutrient loss, freeze until solid, and then transfer the frozen food cubes into an organic, bleach-free wax paper-lined plastic freezer bag. When mealtime comes, thaw a food cube or two (following the directions and precautions in Part III) and feed it to your baby. The *Food Cube Method* can be used for cooked puréed 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.

### **Poop Panic!**

Beware that 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. 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 contains mucus, inform your pediatrician. You may want to retain a stool sample for your doctor to analyze. Your baby's digestive tract might be irritated from a food that he has been eating and 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.

**REMINDER:** Remember to keep your facial expression pleasant when you are changing your baby's diaper. (With some poops, this may be a real challenge!)

### **Baby's Second Meal and Beyond**

Tomorrow, when it's time for your baby's second meal of solid foods, please follow the directions in Chapter 8, *Feeding Your Super Baby During the First Few Weeks* beginning on page 93. Please read the next few chapters before feeding your baby his second meal, as they contain important information on keeping your baby safe. If it is impossible for you to read them in their entirety before your baby's second meal, then please take a few minutes now to skim through them and read just the subheadings.

**TIP:** If your baby has problems with gas, you may want to consider giving her simethicone drops. These drops act as an antiflatulent to help relieve your baby's gas pains and are claimed to be safe. They are not absorbed by your baby's intestinal system and pass right through it. Sold over the counter under the name Mylicon® Drops, they also come in generic brands which probably work just as well, but are much cheaper. They really helped whenever my third son was screaming with gas pain. As always, get an OK from your pediatrician before you administer any medications to your baby, even those you can buy without a prescription.

**TIP:** Some experts swear that the carminative oil in fennel is an excellent remedy for colic. Make fennel tea for your baby by pouring 4-5 cups of boiling water over 1 teaspoon fennel seeds. Steep for 10 minutes, strain well, and cool. Administer 1-2 ounces at a time. As always, consult your pediatrician to get his advice first before administering fennel, other medicinal herbs, or any medication to your baby.

## Food Allergies and the Four-Day Wait Rule

An allergy is an abnormal reaction by the body's immune system to some substance. An allergic reaction to food occurs when the body perceives an ingested food as a threat and overproduces antibodies to counteract it.

### 4-7 Days Waiting Period after the Introduction of Each New Food

It is possible that your baby has one or more food allergies, especially if food allergies run in your family. When your baby eats a food that he is allergic to, a reaction (like hives) can occur immediately, or a reaction can be delayed and occur SEVERAL DAYS LATER. Because of this, it is important that you wait several days after the introduction of any new food in order to see if that new food will trigger an allergic reaction. In other words, follow the *Four-Day Wait Rule*.

#### **The Four-Day Wait Rule**

**Introduce only one new food at a time. After you introduce your baby to a new food, do not introduce another new food for at least four days and watch carefully for signs of allergies.**

**Note:** Some experts recommend a 3-day waiting period, some recommend waiting 5 days, and still others recommend a full week of waiting between new foods. Consult with your pediatrician and follow his recommendation.

It is important that you understand that a 4-day wait does NOT mean that you feed your baby lots of that one new food, or that you feed him only that new food during the waiting period. In fact, only one small feeding of the new food can be enough to cause an allergic reaction. During the waiting period, feed him a variety of foods to which he has been previously introduced as well as some of the new food.

### Wait No Longer than One Week

Some authors recommend waiting a full week after each new food. A one-week trial period is fine, but please don't wait any longer than a week before giving your baby other foods. Feeding him one food for too long a time may produce a sensitivity in him to that food. Four to seven days is a long enough time to determine if your baby has an allergy to a food.



### Introduce Single Foods Only

Be careful that each new food is a single food. For example, don't feed your baby yogurt that is mixed with peaches for the first time, if peaches haven't been introduced before either. If there is an allergic reaction, you won't know whether it was the peaches or the yogurt. The same goes for commercial "mixed dinners." Do not feed them to your baby until each ingredient in the dinner has been introduced individually using the *Four-Day Wait Rule*. Same goes for multi-ingredient stews and soups.

### Watch for Signs of Allergies

After each new food is introduced, watch your baby carefully for the next 4 days, looking for any of the signs of allergies listed in the box below. Most allergic reactions manifest themselves in vague symptoms that you may not notice if you're not watching carefully. Although many of these symptoms are commonly caused by a cold or other illness, there is a possibility that they are indications of an allergy to the most recently introduced new food. Consult your pediatrician to be sure.

Allergy symptoms can occur in almost any part of the body, but most commonly they manifest in the digestive tract (nausea, diarrhea, etc.), the respiratory system (runny nose, wheezing, etc.), and the skin (rashes, hives, etc.). As you can see from the list below, they range from mild to severe, and even death can result. I certainly don't mean to unduly alarm you. Serious food allergies are extremely rare in healthy babies, especially when solid foods are delayed until 6 months of age. And parents are usually aware of food allergies that run in the family. So please don't worry excessively over possible serious allergic reactions.

Signs of Allergies			
Nausea	Cough	Lip swelling	Headache
Vomiting	Wheezing	Face swelling	Irritability
Gas	Breathing difficulties	Rashes	Fatigue
Diarrhea	Asthma	Diaper rash	Behavior problems
Frequent bowel movements	Runny nose with clear secretions	Hives	Convulsions
Abdominal pain	Eye swelling	Itching	Shock
Bed-wetting		Eczema	Death
		Mouth ulcers	

### 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 him, and he will become closer to you as he does when you breast or bottle-feed him.

Mealtimes are important to your baby's social development. During your baby's first year, he should develop a sense of trust, and relaxed mealtimes are a large part of the process. If his first experiences with food are within an atmosphere of tension and frustration, eating problems may develop that can last a lifetime. Your baby will actually grow and develop better if he is fed in a loving environment rather than one that is emotionally negative. Feeding your baby involves much more than food.

### 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 was *How Much Is That Doggie in the Window?* because I said "WOOF! WOOF!" between phrases. (My older boys asked me to refrain from doing this when they had friends over.) However, you should not drag out baby's mealtimes beyond 20-30 minutes. The high chair's main purpose should be eating, not entertainment.

If an older baby gets antsy while you are 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. The invention of the suction toy has saved parents many backaches. During the actual meal, remove all toys so that your baby can concentrate on eating. Keep distractions to a minimum.

**TIP:** Save her absolute favorite small toy for when you are dining out and she is ready to let out a howl. Please remove her from the restaurant if she's noisy. There are a lot of people around you paying for dinner and a babysitter so that they can enjoy a quiet, romantic meal on a rare night out without the baby. By the way, if you are going to take a baby

or toddler out to dinner, it's a good idea to take some *Super Baby Food* with you. You can slowly feed her to keep her busy during the wait for the meal (and it's a long wait if you have a toddler with you.)

### Eating Is an Important Learning Process

Baby mealtimes are the foundation for a lifetime of the healthy attitudes and the eating habits so necessary for the prevention of adult eating disorders. Allow your baby to participate as much as possible in the feeding process. Eating, like walking or any other skill, must be learned. Self-feeding is important to your baby's physical development, eye-hand coordination, and manual dexterity. It is also important to her intellectual development. Allowing your baby to freely self-feed shows her that you have confidence in her abilities, which increases her self-confidence, independence, and self-esteem. Your tolerance, patience, and acceptance teach her that the world is not a restrictive, formidable place and that she is free to be creative.

**REMINDER:** It is important to have a positive, cheerful attitude each time you place your baby in his high chair or when you find yourself getting frustrated about the mess.

Pay close attention and you will see that meals are a special education in itself. Learning begins with your baby's very first meal.

Your baby also learns about cause and effect while eating: Raise my hand this way and the cracker reaches my mouth; tip the cup to this angle and liquid will flow out and into my mouth or onto the tray; drop the spoon and it falls to the floor and goes "ting" and Mom/Dad picks it up. The concept of object permanence is reinforced. The spoon still exists, even when it's on the floor and I cannot see it.

**WARNING:** Restricting a baby from self-feeding during his first year may cause feeding problems later on.

### Praise the Good, Ignore the Bad

Most babies spit out food, throw food and dishes on the floor, and perform other seemingly mischievous acts in the high chair. Your reaction will determine whether the behavior will continue or, worse, become a power

ploy. Giving “normal baby behavior” attention, even negative attention, may reinforce the behavior. Keep a poker face when your baby does something in the high chair that annoys you—he will notice if you look upset and may begin to practice **tormenting** entertaining you.

**TIP:** Try making a game of eating to prevent food on the floor.

**TIP:** If your baby looks adorable when she experiments and spits food over her chin for the first time, don’t smile or laugh. She may enjoy your response and repeat the spitting after it’s no longer cute.

### DO Play with Your Food

Babies are messy eaters, so make sure that you have the feeding area set up for easy cleanup. It is perfectly normal for a baby to dip his fingers into bowls of food, suck his fingers and fist, squeeze and smear food onto his face and the tray with his palm and fingers, mash it into his hair, spit it out or let it drool down his chin, blow it at you or on the wall, throw it on the floor along with cups and bowls, and spill his drinks.

Be assured that to everything, there is a learning purpose. Your baby is not doing these things to provoke you—he is experimenting and learning about his environment and the texture and feel of his food. She explores her food just as she explores her toys. Restrain your impulse to be neat and encourage self-feeding. Your baby doesn’t need Miss Manners’ approval.

**TIP:** Before self-feeding mealtimes, roll up baby’s sleeves to keep them clean. Bibs and other “how to keep baby clean” tips are discussed in Chapter 31.

**TIP:** Although a wet wipe-up towel works fairly well to clean a baby’s fingers, a finger bowl (like in fancy restaurants) works even better. Dip your little one’s hands into the water and dry them with a wipe-up towel.

**TIP:** When some babies begin self-feeding, their moms get them used to wearing a hat or shower cap to keep their hair clean. Make it fun and your baby just might go for it.

### **Self-Feeding Babies Eat Slowly**

It seems to take forever for a baby to feed himself, but once again, be patient. Grin and bear it when he endlessly explores his food before putting it in his mouth. As long as some eating is taking place, let him be. When it becomes all play, it's time to end the meal.

### **Self-Feeding Babies DO Eat Enough**

Your baby will feed herself inefficiently, and you may wonder if more food is going into her mouth or onto the floor. She will consume much less food than when you spoon-feed her, but be assured that she will eat enough for her growing needs. Remember—a healthy baby will eat the proper amount of food and will not starve herself. Coincidentally, by the time your baby is skilled enough to self-feed, she will also be growing at a much slower rate and need fewer calories.