

SAMPLE CHAPTER

First Foods!



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Chapter 2

First Foods!



Whether your baby is starting to stare you down when you eat, an eager family member is pleading to give your baby first foods, or your baby seems less satisfied after a feed, you are starting to think it might be time to give your baby some first foods. But how do you know if your baby is ready? A “yes” answer to the following questions is a clear sign it is time:

- Is your baby between 4-6 months old? If you’re exclusively breastfeeding, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends waiting until as close to 6 months as you can before introducing solid foods because we think this helps you optimize the benefit of breastfeeding.
- Does your baby have great head and neck control?
- Can your baby sit up unassisted or with a little support in a high chair?
- Is your baby staring at you (or more accurately, your food) and drooling when you eat, making you feel very guilty to not be feeding her, too?

You will find that the newborn reflexes – sucking, rooting, extrusion reflex (sticking his or her tongue out when something touches the lips) – will start to fade as skills to eat nonliquid foods emerge. Also, your baby’s gag reflex will gradually decline. As it does, your baby’s ability to handle more complex textures improves. This is because your infant can now better coordinate up and down jaw movements, movement of the tongue from side to side, and the circular jaw motion required to effectively chew foods.

How to Start

Given the list above, you are sure it's time for your baby to eat foods. So how do you do it?

1. Choose where to do it. Help your infant learn early on that eating is at the table and a social experience with the family by offering first solids at the table with limited distractions. Turn off the television or other screens. Sit down together and get ready to offer the first bite.

2. Choose what to offer. We've got a list of excellent first foods (Table 1) but the bottom line is there is no one right food to offer first. The key is that you choose a single-ingredient food just to make sure that if your child has a reaction to it, you know what the food is that caused the reaction. In the first year or so of eating solid foods (about 6 months to 18 months) most babies are very open to trying new foods. Part of this may be because their taste buds are not well formed yet, so foods like bitter vegetables, fish, and spice that toddlers may shun, taste just fine to an infant. Take advantage of this opportunity to expose your baby to all kinds of different tastes and textures! Your future self (i.e. when you are the parent of a toddler) will thank you.

Anything that you love to eat and/or hope your child will eat later should be on the menu (with the exception of sugary/salty/super-sweet foods. Your baby doesn't know the difference yet, so hold off on introducing sugary foods – including juice – for as long as possible). And if you have an infant who seems to refuse new foods, not to worry. Give it a break and try to offer it again. It can take 15-20 tries to like a previously-rejected food, so be patient and continue to offer (but not force) the food.



There are many
“right” ways to
start and advance
solid foods.

Table 1. Our Recommended First Foods

Pediatricians used to always recommend starting infants with rice cereal due to its high iron content (from fortification) and ease of offering. However, we do not recommend this anymore. One reason is because recent tests of rice have found that there are higher than acceptable levels of arsenic in rice. Exposure to arsenic in food is not good for anyone and can be dangerous to the brain development of an infant. Another reason is that rice cereal tends to be highly processed. While canned baby food purees and lightly processed grains are ok, why not introduce your baby to some of the same foods you are eating? Any number of foods can be great first foods. Here is a sampling of our favorites.

Food	Why	How
Avocados	Rich in monounsaturated fats, also known as “good fats”, avocados are also loaded with vitamin K and folate. Folate is an essential B vitamin needed for brain development and function.	Cut the avocado in half, remove seed and mash with a fork. Need it to be softer? No problem, add breast milk, formula, or a little bit of water.
Banana	Bananas are loaded with potassium, an essential nutrient for the function of each cell in your body. They are portable and easy for on the go!	Peel the banana and mash with a fork to desired consistency.
Sweet Potato	Bright orange in color, these tubers are packed with antioxidant vitamins A and C. Vitamin A is important for vision and has an important role in our immune systems while Vitamin C helps strengthen the immune system. Sweet potatoes also contain iron which is important for baby’s brain development.	<p>Microwave: Pierce the flesh of the sweet potato multiple times, then microwave at 5-minute intervals, check with a fork at each interval. The potato is cooked once tender and a fork passes through easily into the flesh.</p> <p>Oven: Roast whole or cubed sweet potatoes at 375 degrees until fork tender (approximately 30 minutes if cubed or 45-60 minutes if whole).</p>
Butternut Squash	This hardy winter vegetable is full of potassium and vitamins A and C.	Oven: Cut butternut squash in half (length-wise) and scoop seeds out. Roast halves cut side down, or cubed, at 375 degrees for 45 minutes, or until tender.
Broccoli	An excellent source of Vitamins A, C, and B6, broccoli also contains iron and phytonutrients such as sulforaphane, which has been shown in some studies to prevent cancer.	<p>Chop it up and roast it in the oven to bring out natural sweetness.</p> <p>To Roast: Heat oven to 450 degrees. Drizzle olive oil on broccoli florets and place in a single layer on a baking sheet. Roast for 15-20 minutes until slightly browned and crispy.</p>

Food	Why	How
Plums	Rich in B vitamins (Thiamine - vitamin B1, riboflavin - vitamin B2, niacin - vitamin B3, and vitamin B6), plums also offer a good dose of other nutrients such as zinc, potassium, calcium, and iron.	Enjoy sweet plums during the peak season between May through October. During the off seasons when plums can be mealy or make your mouth pucker, try roasting in the oven. Heat oven to 375 degrees. Cut plums in half and remove the pit. Drizzle olive oil on top of the plums. Roast for 15 minutes, or until soft.
Infant Oatmeal	Infant oatmeal is a great alternative to rice cereal for your baby as it is loaded with fiber and the infant variety has been fortified with essential nutrients, such as iron and vitamin E.	Single grain oatmeal cereal can be mixed with formula or breastmilk or added to vegetable or fruit purees.
Lentils	Packed with essential vitamins and nutrients, such as zinc and iron, lentils also are an excellent form of plant-based protein. Iron is important for brain development, while zinc plays an important role in our immune system to fight off germs and maintain integrity of our skin as a barrier.	Lentils come in a wide variety - green, red, yellow, brown, black. Once cooked, lentils are soft and mushy, making them an ideal first food. Simple red lentils: Place 2.5 cups of water into a pot with 1 cup of lentils. Bring to a boil, then simmer and cover with lid for 30 minutes or until tender.
Salmon	Salmon is loaded with vitamins and nutrients, such as B vitamins, choline, selenium, potassium, and iron. Additionally, salmon is perhaps best known for the omega - 3- fatty acid content, particularly DHA (docosahexaenoic acid), which has an important role in eye and brain development.	Salmon can be baked, poached or steamed until firm, then blended with fruits and/or vegetables until smooth. Once your baby has tried each food individually, try these combinations: -Salmon, lentils, sweet potatoes -Salmon, avocado, oatmeal
Chicken	Chicken, a lean source of protein for your baby, is rich in nutrients for many organ systems in the body, including choline, selenium, and iron. Choline is important in the brain and nervous system and selenium is essential to the function of the thyroid gland.	Chicken can be poached or baked, but an even easier way to cook is in a slow cooker. To increase acceptance, offer it warmed slightly, pureed, and mixed with a food your baby has already accepted. Once your baby has tried each food individually, try these combinations: - Chicken, butternut squash - Chicken with plums



3. Choose how. Make sure that the food is soft enough that your child will not choke on it. Since your baby has never had food before, if you just put it on the tray she may have no idea what to do with it, and most infants don't tend to have the coordination to self-feed until around 9 months, though some do as early as 6 months. We recommend that you offer a mashed-up, soft version of a single ingredient food. You can easily and inexpensively "prepare" this for your baby from "real foods" you already have at home with our make-it-yourself infant feeding hacks to help you make this really easy. This is what we recommend, but if you cannot or are on the road, using prepared jarred baby foods is ok as well.

The traditional advice was to start with purees when introducing babies to foods. The thinking was that purees are soft, pose little to no choking hazard, and can be varied in texture and consistency to not feel too much different to an infant than breast milk or formula. This 'easing in' to feeding



Make-It-Yourself Infant Feeding Hacks

Studies show that parents are most likely to feed their kids based on convenience rather than expert nutritional recommendations. We get it! We are busy parents, too. Many barriers can get in the way of making your own baby foods. We've experienced them ourselves and have come up with these make-it-yourself feeding hacks to overcome some of the most common problems and help you save time and energy while retaining all of the fun of feeding your infant the same foods the rest of your family enjoys (and minimize canned baby foods if you can).

Problem: It takes too much time to cook each individual vegetable or fruit

Steaming small amounts of individual fruits and vegetables can be time consuming.

Hack: Save time by steaming fruits and vegetables in foil packets in oven! Place 1 cup of chopped fruits or vegetables in the middle of a piece of foil. Fold the four sides up and then place water over the fruits/vegetables. Bring the two opposite sides of foil together and crimp or roll down and then repeat with the other two opposite sides. The length of time in the oven and amount of water needed will depend on the fruit or vegetable. Generally, harder or tougher vegetables and fruits, such as butternut squash or apples, will take longer to cook compared to plums or green beans.

also makes spoon feeding infants easy. Then in 2005 public health nurse Gill Rapley promoted the idea of 'baby-led weaning'. With 'baby-led weaning' infants are exposed to whole foods from the start. The baby drives feeding amount and is encouraged to self-feed all foods (thus eliminating purees since babies do not have the coordination to spoon-feed themselves), which generally are the same foods that the rest of the family is eating. The risk of choking may be increased with this method, but if you are careful to make sure that the food pieces are soft and small enough, the risk is minimized. Overall, studies have found that there is insufficient evidence currently available to draw conclusions about baby-led weaning. We are of the mindset, and evidence supports that babies who are introduced to a variety of textures, appropriate for their development, will be most likely to eat a variety of textures of foods later and overall will be healthier. Thus, we advocate for a blend of both methods, the details of what we term family-centered feeding (see Chapter 1).

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Problem: Not enough space to store all this fresh baby food in the refrigerator!

Hack: Use an ice cube tray to conveniently store the baby food! Pour the puree into an ice cube tray. Freeze until hard and then place into a freezer bag and label. Generally, 1 ice cube well is about 2 tablespoons or 1 ounce, which happens to be the appropriate serving size for babies just starting solids! Depending on the consistency of your puree, 1 cup of pureed vegetables or fruit will yield approximately 8 ice cubes or half of a standard ice cube tray.

Problem: It's easier to open a jar of baby food.

Hack: The night before, put frozen baby food cube in each Tupperware enough for one meal and keep in fridge until ready to eat. Stack 3-4 Tupperware for the day and keep in the refrigerator. To defrost, microwave for 45 seconds and then stir. Repeat microwaving at 30 second intervals until the food is lukewarm.

4. Choose how. If there was only one pearl of parenting that we could share and that we constantly try to practice with our own kids, it is consistency in routines. Kids thrive on routines and babies are no different. You can practice your consistency and routines by choosing one time per day (to start) that you will offer your baby solid foods. For some families it works best to be the first 'meal' of the day. For others it is at lunchtime. For some it may be dinnertime when the rest of the family is also eating (this is a great way to start the routine of family mealtimes, by the way). It doesn't matter what time of day you choose, but if possible, try to develop a consistent time and routine to offer solids. This doesn't need to take a lot of time or add extra time to an already jam-packed day.

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5. Go! Offer your baby a bite. Expect her to seem to spit it out or not be interested. It's not that she doesn't like it, but more that she doesn't know how to eat it yet. Decide your next steps based on her cues. Does she open her mouth for more? Does she fuss or turn away? Does she seem uninterested? Her response is your cue of whether to feed another bite, or to call it a day and wait to offer the food again tomorrow.



Choosing Jarred Baby Foods: The What, How, and When

Jarred and canned baby foods line the shelves of grocery stores. They are often labeled by infant feeding "stage", indicating a stage 1 food for brand-new to complementary foods infants (6-7 months), stage 2 for developing eaters (7-8 months) and stage 3 for experienced infants (9-12 months). With each stage, the blend of foods increases and the texture thickens, moving from full purees to chunky pieces. Knowing what to choose from a dizzying array of baby foods can be overwhelming. Here's our suggested 3-step process to help make it easier.

1. Use "stage" as a simple guide, not a rule.
2. Read the nutrition label. Make sure the ingredient list includes only foods and no added sugars or sodium.
3. Aim for a combination of interesting tastes and textures, using the general guidance of what and how to eat that we cover in this chapter.
4. Avoid feeding from a jar. Rather, portion out the amount you think your baby will eat. After a jar has been opened, refrigerate any unused food immediately and use within 1-2 days.