

# Infant Nutrition

Breastmilk or formula provides all of the nutrition your baby needs from birth to six months. From around six months, you will need to add solid foods to your baby's diet to provide them with the energy and nutrients they need.

## When to start solid foods

Your baby will need solid foods at around six months of age, but not before four months. At this time, your baby's digestive system will be ready to cope with solid food and their appetite won't be satisfied by breast milk or formula alone.

They will also need more iron in their diet, which isn't provided by breastmilk.

Babies develop at different rates, but signs that your baby is ready to start eating solids include:

- Showing an interest in what you or other family members are eating.

- Being able to sit upright and hold their head steady.

*Breastfeeding (or formula feeding) should continue alongside starting solids. These are still an importance source of nutrition for your baby until at least 12 months of age.*

- Being able to bite and swallow food rather than just pushing it out of their mouth with their tongue.



## Tips for starting

- Choose a quiet time, when you and your baby are relaxed.
- Start with a few teaspoons of food, once a day, after breastfeeding (or giving formula).
- Don't force or coax your baby to eat. If they aren't interested the first time you offer food, try again the next day.
- Always stop when your baby doesn't want any more. Their appetite is the best guide to their needs.
- You may need to try a new food a few times before your baby accepts it but don't worry if there are some foods they don't like. No single food is essential.
- Remember that in the early stages, solids are mainly an opportunity for your baby to learn about new tastes and textures. Breastmilk (or formula) will still be meeting their nutritional needs.
- Don't introduce new foods on consecutive days, in case of a reaction. While allergic reactions can occur straight after the food is eaten, other food reactions can take a few days to appear.
- Always stay with your baby while they are eating, due to the risk of choking.
- If you heat or defrost food for your baby, always check the temperature yourself before offering it to your baby.
- Follow food safety guidelines when preparing food for your baby. Their small size means they are more at risk of food-borne illness.
- Try to cook most of your baby's meals at home using fresh ingredients and avoid adding salt and sugar.
- Commercial baby foods can also be used at times, for convenience.

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## Texture matters

Texture is important when starting solids. Move from smooth, pureed foods to lumpier, more solid textures as your baby develops.

Providing a variety of textures helps them to learn how to chew and encourages self-feeding. By their first birthday, your baby should be eating the same foods as the rest of the family.

Avoid small, hard pieces of food which could increase the risk of choking. This includes nuts, seeds, raw vegetables and pieces of hard fruit like apple.

## Dairy foods & alternatives

Dairy products, including full-fat yoghurt, cheese and custard, can be included in meals from six months. However, cow's milk and plant milks shouldn't be used as a main drink until after 12 months.

If plant-based milk is used, it's important to choose full-fat, calcium-fortified varieties. Soy milk fortified with calcium and vitamin B12 is the best choice as it has a similar nutrient content to cow's milk.

If other plant milks are used, it's

important to speak with a dietitian about including alternative sources of protein and vitamin B12 in your baby's diet.

## Food allergies

It used to be thought that delaying the introduction of potentially allergenic foods (like eggs, fish, seafood and nuts) might reduce the risk of allergies in children.

Research now suggests there is a lower risk of food allergies when these foods are introduced before 10-12 months of age, even when there is a family history of allergy.

However, if there is a family history of food allergies, speak with your doctor first.



## Baby's first foods

There's no particular order for introducing foods but it's important to include iron-rich foods early on. Foods rich in iron include fortified baby cereals, cooked tofu or legumes, lean meat, chicken and fish.

Your baby's first foods could include:

- Iron-fortified baby cereals
- Mashed firm tofu
- Legumes such as lentils or mashed beans or chickpeas
- Well-cooked meat or chicken that is minced or stewed
- Fresh or canned fish, with bones removed
- Vegetables that have been cooked and mashed
- Fruits such as cooked apple or pear, and ripe banana
- Well-cooked rice and pasta (brown rice and wholegrain/wholemeal pasta contain more iron)



## Connect with Sanitarium

Do you have a question about nutrition? If you're looking to find out how much iron you need in your diet or you would like some tips on how to encourage your family to eat a little healthier, Sanitarium's expert team of nutritionists can help. Our free *Ask A Nutritionist* service on our website offers general advice on how to live a healthy lifestyle.

Plus, subscribe to our *Recipe of the Week* and *Wholicious Living* newsletters. You'll receive weekly inspiration on healthy vegetarian recipes and a monthly mix of articles on health, wellbeing and nutrition.

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