

The Assignment: Baby Care Article

Mom's cheat sheet for introducing her infant to solid foods, incorporating genuinely useful information while keeping it fun.

Starting Solids: Baby's First Bites

Until now, your baby has been eating the same thing, all day, every day. It's a comfortable routine, but before long it'll be time to branch out. Starting solid food is an adventure for both of you, as you help your little one experiment with the taste, texture, and experience of eating food from a spoon.

Your baby's first solid meals are all about exploration. Eventually those pureed spoonfuls will lead through finger foods and sandwiches to grown-up tastes. But for now eating is about trying out new flavors, new routines, and new tools.

How do you know it's time for solids? Pediatricians recommend starting somewhere between four and six months—a wide window that gives you the flexibility to time things right. Your baby may be getting curious about what you're eating, copying your eating gestures like opening your mouth, and acting hungry for more than the bottle or breast. If you're seeing these cues and your baby can sit up with help, it's probably time.

For this milestone, a few good tools can make the experience easier for you both. You'll want a seat for the little one, a small spoon, and an easy-to-wash bib. For quick clean-up, cover the floor with a splat mat that you can wipe clean after little spills or toss in the washer for more serious messes.

There are lots of "right" choices for what your baby eats first. Whole-grain baby cereal or pureed fruits or vegetables make great first foods. Pediatricians recommend starting with a single new food, something with just one ingredient, then adding a new one every couple of days. Pretty soon you'll be working with a wide selection.

Should you worry about what *not* to feed your baby? If you have a family history of allergies, your pediatrician can help you plan the best approach. Otherwise, you're free to puree just about anything nutritious and spoon it over. There are two exceptions, though: experts recommend avoiding honey and straight cow's milk for the first year.

When you're ready for that first meal, try to pick a time when your baby's not too full, but also not ravenous. Scoop a small spoonful into your baby's mouth, and see what happens. Don't be surprised if half of it comes back out: just gently scrape it off that chin and spoon it back in. As the meal continues, your little one will let you know how things are going. Babies say "no thanks" to food by closing their mouths or turning away from the spoon. They let you know they want more by leaning toward the spoon or grabbing it as you feed them.

As you experiment with different foods and approaches, remember your baby's nutrition still comes mostly from breastmilk or formula, so there's plenty of time to keep it fun. You have room to play it by ear, to skip feedings if baby's not interested, and to slowly add new foods to the repertoire.