

## Starting Solids

by Dr. Sara Ohgushi, Naturopathic Physician

Q: When should my baby start solid foods? And what should I feed her?

A: Just as babies do not get teeth or crawl at exactly the same age, they are not ready for solid food at exactly the same age. Around six months of age you will see signs the baby is ready and interested: she can sit well, she watches you eat, and isn't satisfied with just playing with the spoon. If you give her food before she's ready, she's likely to just push it out of her mouth.

There is no hurry: breastmilk is the most complete, nutritious food that exists.\* A breastfed baby needs no other food, drink (even water) or supplements until around the middle of the first year. Despite popular belief, studies do not show that solids before bedtime make a baby sleep better. And earlier introduction increases the chances of developing allergies.

Eating solids initially is more about exploring new textures and tastes than about nutrition. Expect a mess, and let the baby decide when she's done with this activity. Pick a nonhurried time when the baby is not tired or starving. Many fathers enjoy the role of feeding the child solid foods.

It is worth the extra money to buy the organic, higher quality baby foods. However, you can make your own even higher quality food at a fraction of the cost. Steam a peeled organic yam, for example, then run it through the blender or food processor or baby food grinder with a little extra water. Next pour it into icecube trays, freeze and store in plastic containers. One or two cubes is all most babies will eat for awhile. Don't add salt or any other flavoring: baby's tastebuds will appreciate nature's subtler tastes.

I like starting with mostly vegetables for the first 1-2 months. Steamed yam, winter squashes, carrots, broccoli, pear and fresh avocado make good first foods. (A ripe avocado only needs a little mashing and contains high quality fats that are good for baby.) Introduce foods one at a time, adding a new one no sooner than every 3-5 days. Then if the baby has a reaction such as congestion, constipation, gas, loose stools or diaper rash you will know to wait a few more months before trying that food again.

After a month or two you can introduce some whole grains such as brown

rice cereal or oatmeal. (White rice cereal has fewer nutrients and can be constipating.) Mild fruits such as pear, melon or organic applesauce can be mixed with the grain. Gradually, a little fish or organic meat mixed with the vegetables or grains gives baby some additional iron and protein.

It's best to hold off on common allergens as long as possible. These include: dairy, peanuts/peanut butter, citrus fruits, eggs, corn, wheat and tomato. If you have a family history of allergies, hay fever, eczema or asthma you might want to wait well over a year before attempting these foods. By avoiding them early when baby's digestive tract is more permeable, you may avoid sensitizing them to these foods, which is how allergic reactions develop.

Some families (baby and/or mom's choice) skip the mushy food stage altogether. Some babies just don't like being fed. They are delighted when they can pick up some small steamed cubes of carrot, yam, and later tofu, berries, steamed peas and "O" or puffed (minimally or unsweetened) cereal. This is generally around 8-9 months. Of course avoid easily choked on foods such as hotdogs, whole grapes, popcorn, nuts and seeds. Also, do not give honey to a child under one year of age.

Relax and enjoy baby's reactions to different tastes. Don't be surprised if their appetites and preferences are quite variable. It will be months before most babies are ready to eat three times a day. Breastfeeding continues to be an important part of a baby's diet until at least a year.\* There is no hurry. Don't worry- you'll be feeding them solids for years to come!

\*Note: Artificial baby milks are significantly inferior foods to breastmilk, but still more comprehensive nutrition than most solid foods. Therefore, the above guidelines regarding solids apply to nonbreastfed babies as well.

Note: This article is not meant to substitute for direct medical advice. For more details, references to this article or questions, email Dr. Ohgushi at [sao@imagina.com](mailto:sao@imagina.com), or call her at 503-703-7825 to schedule a free 20 minute consultation. OFFICE: 2304 E. Burnside, Suite 101, by appointment only.

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