



# Starting family foods

introducing your baby to solid foods

FOR PARENTS OF 0-12 MONTH OLD BABIES

## 0-6 MONTHS

### Breastmilk or infant formula?

Australian and international health authorities recommend exclusive breastfeeding, with no other milks, food or drinks needed until about 6 months. At about 6 months it is recommended that you begin to offer solid foods while continuing to breastfeed until 12 months or longer. Breastfeeding can continue to provide health benefits in your baby's second year of life.



## FROM 6 MONTHS

**Continue breastmilk or infant formula as main food. Small amounts of cooled boiled water may be offered in a cup.**

Stronger suck  
Shows interest in food  
Begins chewing  
Can swallow solids

For most babies good first foods are those which are soft and easily digested.

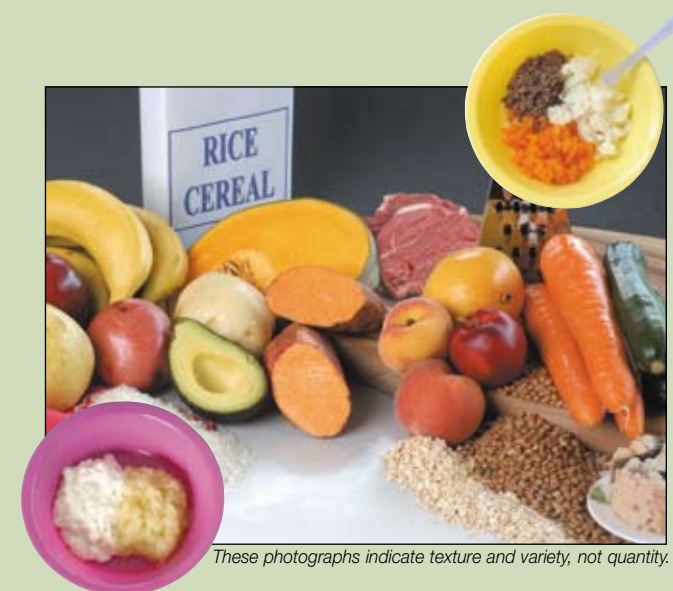
Include mashed:

- vegetables (eg pumpkin, potato, sweet potato, taro)
- fruits (eg cooked pears/apple, ripe banana)
- well cooked rice or rice cereal

See 3. 'Food Safety and Hygiene'.

And then include coarsely mashed fruit and vegetables and well cooked:

- minced, stewed or grated meat (cook, freeze then grate)
- fish (fresh or tinned) – remove bones
- legumes (eg lentils)
- pasta
- bread (eg toast fingers and rusks)



These photographs indicate texture and variety, not quantity.

## FROM ABOUT 8 MONTHS

**Continue breastmilk or infant formula as main food.  
Cooled, boiled water may be offered in a cup.**

Biting  
Chewing  
Finger Foods  
Interested in feeding self

Babies become better at eating with practice. Most babies can now manage an increased variety of foods and textures including:

- all fruits and vegetables (including salad)
- cereals (including breads, rice, pasta and noodles, breakfast cereals) preferably wholegrain

And then try:

- cheese, custard and yoghurt
- cooked egg

Until 12 months cow's milk should only be used in small amounts to mix with family foods.

Breastfeeding provides ongoing benefits, so continue for as long as you and your baby wish.

From 12 months cow's milk can be offered from a cup. Toddler follow-on milks are not necessary.

By 12 months, children are able to eat most family foods and drink from a cup.



*These photographs indicate texture and variety, not quantity.*

## 1. WHY WAIT UNTIL 6 MONTHS?

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents (2003) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) Global Strategy (2003) recommend fully breastfeeding for about 6 months. At around this time solid foods can be added to your baby's diet.

At the age of 6 months, babies are ready for new foods.

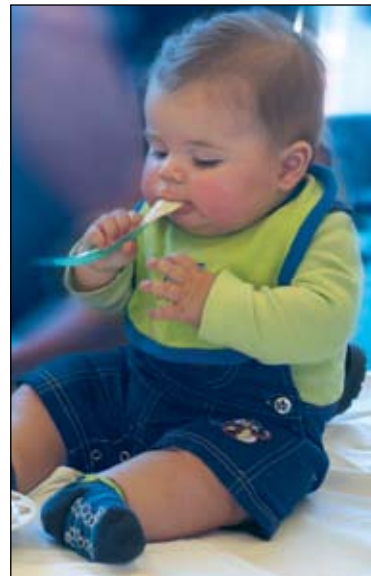
**Benefits to introducing solids before 6 months: none**

**Potential problems when introducing solids before 6 months:**

- increased risk of food allergies
- decreased breastmilk production
- increased exposure to germs
- increased load on your baby's kidneys
- constipation, from poor digestion

If you feel your baby needs to commence solids before 6 months of age, contact your local Child and Family Health Nurse or General Practitioner.

See 9. 'Further Information'.



## 2. THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN FIRST INTRODUCING SOLIDS

Breast or bottle-feed your baby first. Breastmilk or formula is still the most important part of your baby's diet.

At first solid foods are extras and new tastes for your baby.

Many babies will only eat a tiny amount to start with (less than ½ teaspoon). Others will want more.

Mothers often find that a good time of day to start is when baby is not too tired or too hungry.



It is recommended that babies are offered one new food at a time, leaving several (ideally 5 to 10) days between new foods. This makes it easier to identify a food that might disagree with them.

Babies have very sensitive taste buds at this stage and don't need salt, sugar or other flavourings added to their food.

Some babies may not like the taste of new foods. If you offer the new food first at the main meal of the day for 10 days in a row they will actually begin to look forward to it.



### 3. FOOD SAFETY AND HYGIENE

Babies can easily get sick from food poisoning:

1. Wash hands with warm soapy water before preparing food for your baby or feeding your baby.
2. Clean food preparation areas, before and after preparing food. Use clean utensils.
3. Wash fruit and vegetables well – even vegetables that are to be peeled and cooked.
4. Date and label food to be refrigerated or frozen. Prepared food can be stored in the body of the fridge for up to 48 hours. Hot food can be put straight into the refrigerator.
5. Thaw frozen food in the refrigerator, not on the bench (at room temperature). Defrost in the microwave if you are going to use the food straight away.
6. Check the temperature of the food by tasting it with a clean spoon. Use another clean spoon to feed your baby. Don't put your baby's food in your mouth then give it to your baby.
7. Once food has been warmed and offered to your baby, throw out any left in the bowl.
8. It is important to realise that 'off' food can look, smell and taste OK. So, 'if in doubt, throw it out.'

#### Eating safely

As babies are more likely to choke on food than an adult, it is important:

- to watch them while they are eating
- not to let them move around while they are eating
- to use a safety harness when your baby is in a high chair or low chair
- to avoid giving them nuts and small hard foods (such as raw or undercooked pieces of hard fruit and vegetables, popcorn, rice cakes and frankfurts).

If using water to mix with baby foods, boil and cool it first. After heating food, always mix it thoroughly and test its temperature before offering it to your baby.

### 4. FINGER FOODS

*At around 8-9 months babies will begin to actively explore their world and therefore this is a great time to take advantage of their natural interest in food.*

To help your baby learn to eat family foods, it is important he or she practice. Offer an increasing variety of foods presented in different sizes and textures. Discovering, handling and chewing food assists the development of social skills and promotes the pleasure of eating.

Babies enjoy foods that they can pick up with their hands and eat by themselves. Wash your baby's hands with warm soapy water first.

#### Suggestions

1. Boiled or steamed vegetables – potato, pumpkin, carrot circles, zucchini strips, beans, peas, corn or slices of beetroot. Hard vegetables need to be well cooked and offered as large chunks.
2. Raw foods – whole small banana, tomato slices, a small ripe pear, a small whole orange peeled.
3. Cooked meat may be cut into strips for chewing or small thin pieces to be picked up with the thumb and forefinger.

- Remember eating needs to be a safe and enjoyable activity.
- Always remain with your baby while they are eating.
- Eating is a social occasion.
- Eating healthy meals together provides the best example for your baby.

*This photograph indicates texture and variety, not quantity.*



### 5. COMMERCIAL BABY FOODS

These can be useful for some mothers, **but**:

- they are more expensive than home cooked foods
- they look, taste and smell different from family foods and so don't help babies learn about the foods the rest of the family eats
- when they are used often, babies may become so used to them that they are reluctant to change to family foods.

Home prepared food can be just as convenient. Individual food can be cooked, mashed and then frozen in ice cube trays.

Many food products marketed for babies (eg baby custards/yoghurts/pureed fruit) offer no nutritional advantage over regular products.



## 6. WHAT ELSE?

### Sleep

It is common for children to wake once or twice a night even into their second year. There is no evidence to support the idea that introducing solids early will help your baby sleep longer at night.



### Weight

Some people may think that small babies need to start solids early to help them gain weight more quickly. Others may think that large babies need to start solids early in order to keep growing well. Breastmilk provides all the nutrients a healthy baby needs for around the first 6 months of life **whatever their size**.

See 1. *'Why Wait Until 6 Months?'*

### How Much Food?

Babies are individuals. Some babies eat enthusiastically and others will take longer to want more than just a taste. If you continue to offer a variety of healthy foods, your baby will eat to their 'appetite'. Remember, milk is still a very important food for babies for at least the first 12 months.

### Fussy Eaters

Almost all babies will learn to accept family foods if they are offered in a positive, friendly way. If you have any concerns, check with your local Child and Family Health Nurse or General Practitioner. See 9. *'Further Information'*.

## 7. UNSUITABLE FOODS

**Honey** – can have bacteria in it which causes severe illness.

**Nuts** – babies can choke on nuts easily. Peanuts also present a risk of allergy.

**Tea** – contains substances which reduce your baby's ability to absorb iron and other essential minerals.

**Fruit Juice** – offers no nutritional benefits to babies under 12 months. Eating whole fruit is recommended. If offering juice after 12 months, dilute to 1/4 juice and 3/4 cooled boiled water.

**Cow's Milk** – is not recommended as baby's main milk until after 12 months. Use breastmilk or infant formula.

**Reduced fat milk products** – are **not** recommended for children under 2 years. Skim milk is **not** recommended for children under 5 years.

## 8. ALLERGIES

If allergy is a problem in your family seek advice from a health professional before starting solids. The following foods are more commonly associated with allergies in babies.

- milk
- eggs
- seafood/fish
- all types of nuts (eg peanuts, cashews etc)
- sesame paste
- chocolate nut spreads
- soy and wheat



## 9. FURTHER INFORMATION

For Further Information:

### Early Childhood Health Centres

For centre locations throughout NSW, consult your local White/Yellow Pages or [whitepages.com.au](http://whitepages.com.au) under the heading 'Community Health Centre' or 'Early Childhood Health Centre'

**Healthy Kids Website:** [www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au](http://www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au)

### Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA)

ACT/Southern NSW (02) 6258 8928  
NSW (02) 8853 4999

*You can also look under Australian Breastfeeding Association in your local White Pages (Some books may still list the ABA as Nursing Mothers' Association of Australia).*

ABA Website: [www.breastfeeding.asn.au](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au)

**Tresillian** 24-hour Parents Helpline on (02) 9787 0855 or 1800 637 357 (freecall outside Sydney metropolitan area).  
Tresillian Website: [www.tresillian.net](http://www.tresillian.net)

**Karitane** Care Line: 1300 227 464

TTY (for hearing impaired) (02) 9794 1848  
Karitane Website [www.karitane.com.au](http://www.karitane.com.au)

### Mothersafe. Medications in Pregnancy and Lactation Service:

Phone (02) 9382 6539 or 1800 647 848 (freecall outside Sydney metropolitan area).

Developed by the Clinical Stream of Womens', Children and Family Health and the Nutrition Department Central Coast Health, in partnership with the Australian Breastfeeding Association and mothers of the Central Coast. The information in this leaflet is intended as a general guide for parents of healthy full term babies. For more copies of this pamphlet contact the Better Health Centre, Ph (02) 9879 0443, Fax (02) 9879 0994.

### REFERENCES

'Global Strategy For Infant and Young Child Feeding' WHO 2003

'Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia' NHMRC 2003