



Baby's first foods



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Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Health**

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**The right start...
a guide to the best
foods for your baby.**

Delivering a **Healthy WA**

Getting started...

Breastmilk is the perfect food for your baby. It provides all the nutrients your baby needs for the first six months of life, and is an important food for the first year. If you are not breastfeeding, use an infant formula.

Babies will be ready for solid food at about six months. Your baby's first attempts at eating are important food experiences that help your child become familiar with food. At the start your baby will only eat small amounts so breastmilk (or formula) is still the most important food at this time.

At first...

At first your baby may not be too sure about solid foods – more may end up on the floor than in your baby's mouth. But in time, especially if you are patient and relaxed, your baby will learn to eat and enjoy a wide range of family foods.

By the end of the first year, your baby will have progressed from pureed or mashed foods to foods that are chopped into small pieces.

Experts Say...

Introducing solid food at the right time is very important. If you start too early, your baby's digestive system is not ready for solid food. It can also increase the risk of allergies, overweight, obesity and other health problems.

If you wait too long after six months, your baby will miss out on important nutrients needed for growth and development. It also becomes harder for your baby to accept new tastes and textures.



When is the right time?

At six months of age most babies are ready to try new foods and textures, and ways of feeding.

Try starting solids if your baby:

- Is about six months of age
- Can sit on your lap and can hold his/her head steady
- Shows interest in food (eg. reaches for food when you are eating)
- Takes pureed food from a spoon without pushing it out of the mouth with the tongue
- Looks for more food after a full breastfeed.

Babies develop at different rates. The recommendations for introducing solids in this brochure generally suit most babies. If you are experiencing problems or if you are unsure if your baby is ready for solid foods, contact your community health nurse, dietitian or GP.

Tips for success...

- Be relaxed!
- Make sure baby is sitting comfortably and is not too hungry, or too tired
- Use a soft plastic spoon, not a metal teaspoon
- If baby refuses first time, try again in a day or so
- Always stay with your baby when they are eating
- Sit your baby with the family at meal times to watch and learn
- Be prepared for a mess, it's part of learning to eat.

How do i start?

In the first few weeks give your baby small amounts of pureed, soft foods from a soft spoon.

Start with small tastes of food, for example half a teaspoon, after a breastfeed.

Don't worry if your baby doesn't swallow very much food in the beginning. Babies often refuse food or spit it out.

Remember, every baby develops at its own pace. Some will learn to eat from a spoon quickly, others will have little interest. Don't give up, just try again another time.

The amounts suggested are just a guide to help you get started. Your baby will take more solids at each feed as it gets used to food and continues to grow.

Be aware that when different foods are introduced your baby's poo will change in colour and texture. Don't be alarmed, this is normal.



Foods

to try

first

Start with about a teaspoon of baby rice cereal made into a smooth paste with breastmilk, infant formula or cooled, boiled water. Offer once or twice a day, after a breastfeed or formula feed.

Gradually increase the amount over a couple of days until your baby is eating about 1–2 tablespoons at a time.

Next, offer pureed vegetables then fruits.

It's best to introduce savoury tastes first.

Try each new food on its own the first time.

Give a new food every couple of days.

As your baby gets used to solid food, increase the amount you offer at a feed.

Try pureed, cooked vegetables like:

- Potato • Pumpkin
- Carrot • Spinach



Then try pureed, cooked fruit like:

- Apple • Pear • Peaches
- Apricots



Follow with other pureed soft fruits like:

- Banana • Avocado



Then follow with pureed:

- Meat • Fish • Chicken



Preparing baby's food

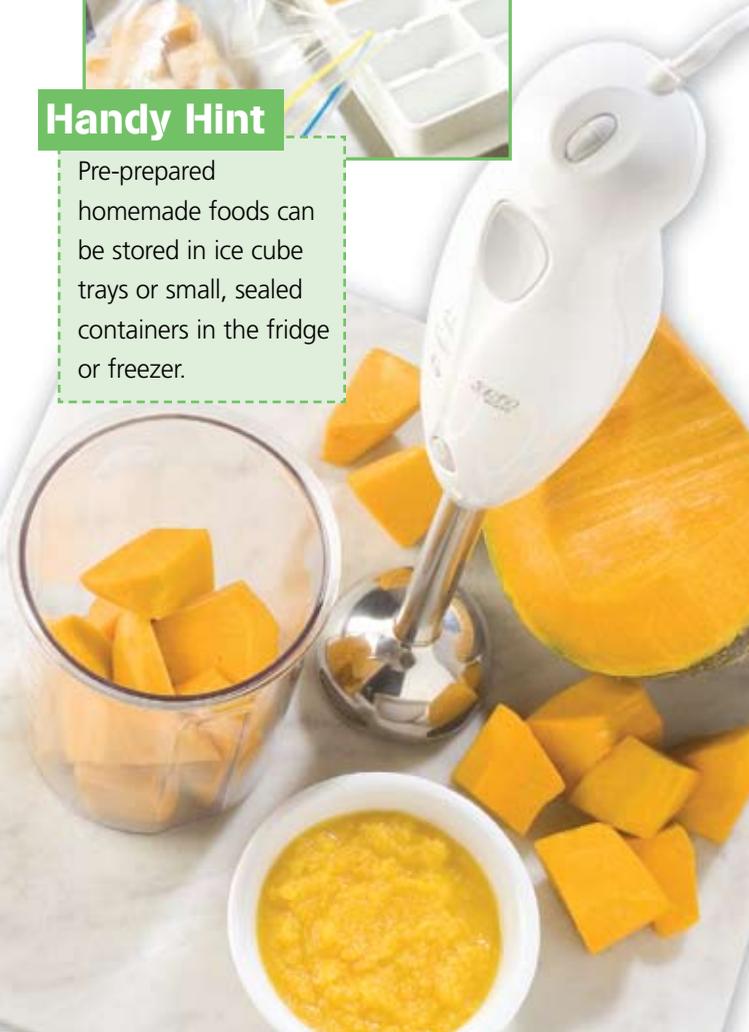
Steam or boil vegetables or fruits in a little water with no added sugar or salt.

Puree foods using a blender, or by mashing through a sieve to make sure there are no lumps.



Handy Hint

Pre-prepared homemade foods can be stored in ice cube trays or small, sealed containers in the fridge or freezer.



What about commercial baby foods?

Frequent use of commercial baby foods is not recommended as it may lead to delayed chewing and poor acceptance of new tastes and textures. They can be used as a standby or when travelling, but they shouldn't form the basis of your baby's diet.

Homemade food offers more variety in taste and texture and is cheaper than commercial baby food.



About allergies...

Breastmilk gives the best protection from allergies. For greatest protection do not give solids before six months and continue breastfeeding for at least 12 months.

A very small number of babies are allergic to some foods. There are a number of different symptoms of food allergy or food intolerance. These symptoms can be the same as other childhood illnesses.

If there is a strong family history of allergy, or you think your baby is allergic to certain foods, it is important to seek medical advice. Don't try to treat suspected food allergies or intolerances yourself. You may need help from a dietitian to make sure your baby's nutritional needs are met.

Foods often linked with allergy include...

- cow's milk • soy products • eggs
- nuts • fish • shellfish
- citrus fruits • wheat



What to do if...

My baby doesn't like the new food...

Don't worry or give up, just offer the food another time. New foods may need to be offered up to 10 times before babies accept them.

The food tastes bland...

Babies are more sensitive to taste. Food may taste bland to you, but your baby will enjoy the simple taste. There is no need to add salt, sugar or spices to your baby's food.

Try not to let your own likes and dislikes limit your baby's choices

The weather is hot...

Give your baby plenty of fluid in hot weather to prevent dehydration. You may need to breastfeed or offer infant formula more often. Cooled, boiled water is the only other drink recommended for babies who need extra fluid.

Prevent Choking...

Babies and young children are at risk of choking on foods that are:

- ➔ Small, hard, round, sticky. Popcorn, nuts, seeds, hard lollies and corn chips are not suitable for babies.

Make sure you:

- ➔ Remove small bones and gristle from meat, fish or poultry
- ➔ Remove the skin from sausages
- ➔ Cook and mash hard fruit and vegetables (eg. peas, beans, carrots and apple)
- ➔ Check that small, round foods like grapes are well chewed.

Always watch carefully when your baby is eating

At about 8 months...

By about eight months your baby will be eating a variety of foods and trying thicker textures like soft lumps and minced foods.

Even if babies have only a few teeth, they can chew mashed food and finely diced meats with their gums.

Once your baby is eating a variety of foods you can offer solids before breastmilk or formula.

Around eight months of age, many babies like to feed themselves. It is a good time to give 'finger foods' that your baby can hold and chew. Try toast, bread and other finger foods. Encourage your baby to drink water from a cup at this age.



Foods to move on to...

Once babies are having different textures, most can eat minced or mashed food from the family menu. This may be messy, but it's an important part of the learning process.

Try introducing a greater variety of foods from the five food groups.

Meat and meat alternatives

Tender well-cooked meats:

- Stews and casseroles
- Diced or chopped meat and chicken
- Lean mince
- Fish without bones or batter
- Eggs

Well-cooked and mashed legumes:

- Baked beans
- Lentils



Breads and cereals



Plain unsweetened breakfast cereal:

- Porridge
- Weet-Bix®
- Vita Brits®

Breads (including toast) Rice, Pasta

Vegetables

Pieces of well-cooked vegetables:

- Carrot
- Potato
- Beans
- Peas
- Broccoli



Fruit

Pieces of soft chopped, raw fruit:

- Banana
- Melon
- Tomato

Pieces of cooked apple or pear



Milk, yogurt, cheese

Cow's milk should not be given as a drink until your baby is 12 months old.

From about nine months small amounts of cow's milk can be given as:

- Yogurt
- Cheese
- Milk with breakfast cereal



Foods that are **not suitable** for your baby...

- ✗ Do not add **salt, sugar, butter** or **margarine** to your baby's foods. Your baby enjoys simple tastes.
- ✗ The bacteria in **honey** can be harmful to babies. Honey is not recommended for children less than two years of age.
- ✗ Whole **nuts** are not recommended for infants and young children under the age of five because of the danger of choking. Nut pastes (eg. peanut paste) can be used from 12 months.

Drinks that are **not suitable** for your baby...

- ✗ **Cow's milk** until 12 months old.
- ✗ **Skim or low-fat milk**
- ✗ **Follow-on formulas** are not necessary.
- ✗ **Fruit juice** may cause tooth decay. Juice can also cause loss of appetite, stomach problems or runny poo, which may slow your baby's growth and development. Juice is not recommended for babies under six months, and older infants should be encouraged to eat whole pieces of fruit rather than juice.
- ✗ **Tea, herbal teas, coffee, chocolate drinks,** and **cola drinks** should not be given. These drinks contain tannins and/or caffeine that are not suitable for children.
- ✗ **Soft drinks or cordials** should not be given. Soft drinks and cordials are high in sugar. Intake of these drinks has been linked to obesity and tooth decay.
- ✗ **Energy drinks** should not be given. These drinks claim to have 'energy enhancing ingredients' including vitamins, amino acids, caffeine and/or guarana in amounts that are not safe for children.

Food Safety...

Babies are at greater risk of serious illness from food poisoning. It is important to keep your baby's food safe.

Tips for keeping baby's food safe:

- ➔ Always wash your hands before preparing food
- ➔ Always wash baby's hands before he/she eats
- ➔ Use clean utensils and work surfaces
- ➔ Always use separate chopping boards and utensils when preparing raw food and ready-to-eat foods
- ➔ Wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly before preparing
- ➔ Store prepared food in a sealed container in the fridge or freezer
- ➔ Re-heat pre-prepared food thoroughly before cooling it down to give your baby
- ➔ Never re-heat food more than once
- ➔ Keep pets away from food.



Always wash your hands before preparing food

Feeding your baby: The first 12 months

The first six months

Breastmilk or infant formula.

Your baby will take enough milk to suit his/her needs. At first babies may feed between eight to twelve times in 24 hours. This will cut back to about six feeds as baby grows and takes more at each feed.

Remember there might be times when your baby wants to feed more often. This can be a sign of a growth spurt. This often happens at about six weeks.

About six months

Start solid foods (eg. iron fortified baby cereal).
Give a new food every couple of days – vegetables, then fruits, followed by meat, chicken and fish.

Baby's first solid foods should be smooth with no lumps.

Try about a teaspoon after a breast or formula feed. Gradually increase the amount until your baby is eating about 1–2 tablespoons.

About eight months

Babies often like to feed themselves around this time. Try finger foods like rusks, toast, pieces of cooked vegetable and banana.

Your baby will be ready to try foods with a thicker texture. Mash or mince foods.

Once your baby is eating a variety of foods you can offer a small meal before breastmilk or formula.

Nine to twelve months

Your baby should be able to manage a variety of foods by now. Meal times can still be a messy business but this is all part of learning.

By 12 months your baby will be able to have the same foods as the rest of the family. Make sure you have a variety of nutritious foods and don't live on take-away.

Your baby will probably start with breastmilk or formula when they first wake. Babies have small stomachs so they need about five small meals. Establish meals before introducing nutritious snacks.

For more information...

Local Family Doctor

Local Community Child Health Nurse

See inside your baby's purple 'All About Me' book, in the phone directory under 'Child Health Centres' or www.health.wa.gov.au

Dietitians Association of Australia

To find an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) in your local area visit the 'Find an APD' section of the DAA website www.daa.asn.au or call the APD hotline on Freecall 1800 812 942*

Ngala Helpline

8.00 a.m. – 8.00 p.m. 7 days a week
Telephone (08) 9368 9368
Outside metro area - Freecall 1800 111 546*
www.ngala.com.au

Parenting WA Line

Telephone (08) 6279 1200 (24 hr service)
Outside metro area - Freecall 1800 654 432*

*Calls made from a mobile may be charged at a timed rate.

Remember all babies are different and will have different appetites, use this table as a guide only. Consult your community health nurse or GP if you are worried about feeding your baby.