



Healthy Beginnings

Self-feeding right from the start

When babies are six months they can feed themselves foods that have a variety of textures and can begin self-feeding. Gone are the days of only offering babies pureed foods on a spoon.

Offer more than just purees

When your baby begins eating solid foods (at about six months of age), offer a variety of food textures including purees, mashed, lumpy, shredded, ground or minced, and small pieces of soft foods, often called finger foods. Finger foods can be given even before your baby has any teeth!

Research suggests it is important to introduce textures between six and nine months. Waiting beyond the age of nine months can lead to:

- Feeding problems later on
- Eating less vegetables and fruit

Self-feeding

You can support your baby or toddler to learn to self-feed.

Independence, like self-feeding, is part of healthy child development. You might see this when your baby grabs the spoon or pieces of food to self-feed.

Learning to spoon-feed takes time and using their fingers to eat is often easier.

At first, your baby may grab pieces of food from their tray in their fist and put it into their mouth. Next, they will pick up food with their thumb and index finger.



Expect a mess

Learning to self-feed is messy and takes practice and your patience. To help with clean up, place a mat or towel on the floor or use a bib with a pocket to catch dropped food. A damp cloth (or a bath) at the end of the meal can clean up spills and sticky hands.

Gagging is normal

When new textures or foods are offered, children may gag or cough as part of the normal learning process or to prevent choking. If gagging occurs, remain calm. If gagging happens a lot or gets worse, contact your child's health care provider.

Offer foods that you eat

Adjust the texture of the foods you serve to the rest of the family.

Food "puffs" and rice rusks are processed foods that offer very little nutrition and are not a substitute for offering pieces of healthy foods.



Explore finger-feeding

Finger foods are soft, cut-up foods that can easily be picked up. In addition to the foods listed below, you can cut up foods that you are eating yourself.

Vegetables and fruit

- Cooked fresh or frozen vegetables
- Canned, no-added-salt vegetables
- Soft ripe fruit or shredded apples or pears
- Canned fruit packed in water or juice

Grain products

- Whole grain toast, roti, naan or tortilla
- Whole grain o-shaped cereal
- Whole grain muffins, pancakes or waffles
- Rice, rice noodles or pasta of any shape

Meat and alternatives

- Beef, lamb, chicken or turkey (including ground) cooked in broth or water
- Fresh, frozen or canned fish (without bones)
- Eggs (e.g. scrambled, omelets, French toast)
- Boiled or canned beans and chickpeas rinsed with water
- Firm or extra firm tofu

Milk and alternatives

- Grated or small cubes of cheese

Combining spoon-feeding and finger foods

If you are feeding your child with a spoon, let them hold their own spoon. You can try doing hand-over-hand to help guide the spoon into their mouth.

You can offer finger foods and spoon-fed foods at the same time. If your child shows you they are not interested in being spoon-fed, it is time to offer only finger foods they can feed themselves.

Lower the risk of choking

To lower the risk of choking, make sure pieces of food are soft and are no larger than half centimetre ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch) to one centimetre ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch) pieces in size. This is big enough for little hands to grab and small enough to lower the risk of choking.



$\frac{1}{2}$ centimetre ($\frac{1}{4}$ inch)



1 centimetre ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch)

As your child gets older, pieces can become bite-sized but they should remain soft.

Avoid offering hard foods like raw vegetables since large pieces can break off and cause choking.

Where to find more information

For more information and additional nutrition resources, see york.ca/feedingkids

Speak to a registered dietitian at no cost by calling EatRight Ontario at 1-877-510-5102 or by going to www.ontario.ca/eatright

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