

OFFERING YOUR BABY SOLID FOODS

(SIX TO 12 MONTHS)



Having up-to-date information about feeding your baby is important to help:

- ✓ Meet their nutritional needs
- ✓ Support their development of feeding skills
- ✓ Develop a positive relationship with food

This factsheet has information to help your baby get the nutrition needed for healthy growth and development.

If your baby was born premature or has a medical condition that affects their nutritional needs, talk to your baby's health care provider.

Offer solid foods at about six months

Even though your baby will only eat small amounts of solid foods, they are an important addition at about six months of age to help your baby get the nutrients needed to grow and develop.

Signs your baby is ready for solid foods

When your baby is ready to begin solid foods, they should be able to:

- ✓ Hold their head upright with good control
- ✓ Sit upright and lean forward
- ✓ Show you when they are full (e.g., turn their head away)
- ✓ Pick up food and try to put it in their mouth

If your baby is less than six months of age and is not able to do these things, they may not be ready for solid foods.

How often to offer solid foods each day

Six to nine months of age – work up to three or four times per day

Nine to 12 months of age – Four or five times per day

You can breastfeed before, after or between offering solid foods.

Follow your baby's feeding cues

Continue to breastfeed on demand

Breastmilk continues to provide important nutrients and health benefits, so [breastfeed](#) for as long as you and your baby want. Health Canada recommends that babies continue to breastfeed for up to two years of age or longer.

If your baby is not receiving breastmilk or needs extra milk on top of the volume of breastmilk, offer commercial [infant formula](#) that is purchased in Canada.

Follow feeding cues when offering solid foods

Your baby's tummy is small and many things like growth spurts or teething can affect their appetite.

They might eat just a couple of bites or eat so much you wonder if it is too much. If you follow your baby's [hunger and fullness cues](#), they will eat the right amount.

Your baby is interested or hungry when they

- ✓ Lean forward and reach for food
- ✓ Open their mouth wide when food is offered

Your baby is not interested or full when they

- ✗ Turn their head or face away
- ✗ Keep their mouth closed
- ✗ Lean back away from food

Trust your baby to know

- ✓ When to eat
- ✓ How much to eat
- ✓ Which foods to eat from what you offer

Your job is to decide

- ✓ What foods to offer
- ✓ Where to eat (such as upright in a highchair, with straps and no distractions)

Offer iron-rich foods first

At about six months, your baby needs extra iron from solid foods, so make sure their first foods are [iron-rich](#). This includes:

- ✓ Beef and other meat (lamb, pork)
- ✓ Chicken and dark-meat turkey
- ✓ Eggs
- ✓ Fish (choose [low-mercury](#) most often)
- ✓ Iron-fortified infant cereal
- ✓ Legumes (beans, lentils, chickpeas)
- ✓ Soy products (tofu, edamame)

Continue to offer iron-rich foods at least two times per day. Vitamin C from vegetables and fruit will help your baby absorb iron better, so when your baby eats, include a vegetable and/or fruit.

For vegetarians, offer iron-rich foods at most meals to make sure your baby meets their iron needs.

For vegans or food approaches that may restrict a variety of foods or a whole food grouping, talk with a registered dietitian (call Health Connect Ontario at 8-1-1) or your baby's health care provider.

Introduce new foods daily

Once iron-rich foods are introduced, all other foods can be offered, so introduce a variety of vegetables, fruit, protein foods and grains.

There is no order to follow and old advice like giving vegetables before fruit does not make your baby like vegetables more.

You do not need to wait days between introducing new foods. For example, you can introduce strawberries at breakfast and then avocado at lunch. The only exception is for common food allergens (see below).

If you offer milk-based foods like yogurt and cheese, choose high-fat ones (more than 2% milk fat).

The only food to avoid in the first year is honey (even cooked or pasteurized) due to the risk of infant botulism, a rare but serious type of food poisoning.

Common food allergens

Research shows that there is no need to delay the introduction of common food allergens, even if your baby is at higher risk for food allergies.

Common food allergens can be introduced at about six months of age. These foods include:

- ✓ Cow's milk-based foods (cheese, yogurt)
- ✓ Eggs

- ✓ Fish and shellfish
- ✓ Mustard
- ✓ Peanuts and tree nuts
- ✓ Sesame (seeds, tahini)
- ✓ Soy (tofu, edamame)
- ✓ Wheat

There is no need to wait a certain number of days between introducing common food allergens, they can be offered one day apart. Once you introduce a common food allergen, continue to offer it two to three times a week to maintain tolerance.

If you suspect an allergic reaction (rash, vomiting, diarrhea) do not offer that food again until you talk to your baby's health care provider.

If you suspect a severe allergic reaction (difficulty breathing, swelling of the tongue or throat), call 9-1-1 immediately.

Offer more than just purees

Since babies do not need teeth to chew food, try a variety of textures including:

- ✓ Ground, minced or shredded
- ✓ Cooked or soft, diced foods (cut into pieces ½ to 1 centimetre in size)
- ✓ Lumpy, mashed or pureed

Introduce different textures between six and nine months since waiting beyond nine months can lead to:

- ✗ Feeding problems later on
- ✗ Eating less vegetables and fruit

Self-feeding right from the start

Whether you call it "baby-led weaning" or finger feeding, self-feeding allows more independence with feeding and is part of healthy development.

At first, they may grab pieces of food with their fist and only some of it will end up in their mouth. That is okay - they will get better with practice.

If you are spoon-feeding, let your baby hold their own spoon. This skill takes time to learn so you may find doing hand-over-hand at first to guide the spoon into their mouth helpful.

You can combine finger foods and spoon-fed foods at the same time. Let your baby show you what they are not interested in. If they are not interested in foods from the spoon, avoid forcing or tricking them. Instead, offer mostly finger foods and foods they can eat independently.

Expect a mess

Learning to self-feed is messy and takes practice. Your baby needs 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 at the end of the meal can clean up spills and sticky hands.

Some gagging is expected

Some gagging is normal when learning to eat new textures. It helps your baby to stop from choking. However, if gagging happens a lot or gets worse, talk to your baby's health care provider.

Reduce the risk of choking

- ✓ Keep your baby safe by avoiding foods that are:
- ✓ Hard, small and round (whole grapes, raw carrots, nuts, fruit with pits, hot dogs)
- ✓ Smooth and sticky (nut butter by spoon)

You can make unsafe foods safer by:

- ✓ Grating or cooking raw vegetables
- ✓ Cutting grapes in quarters
- ✓ Removing pits from fruit
- ✓ Thinly spreading nut butters or mixing into food

Meal planning

Offer what you eat

Offer foods that the rest of the family eats and adjust the texture to meet your baby's needs. You do not need special equipment to [make food for your baby](#) at home since many foods can be mashed or cut up using a fork and knife.

When meal planning for the family, consider [Canada's Food Guide](#) and include a:

- ✓ Vegetable or fruit (or both)
- ✓ Protein food (consider iron-rich ones)
- ✓ Whole grain

Since babies do not need their food to be bland, include the herbs and spices that you enjoy. Do limit or avoid added salt or sugar.

Limit or avoid highly processed foods

Rice rusks and food puffs are highly processed foods that have little nutrition, are not suitable substitutes for table foods and do little to teach your baby about texture.

Water and other beverages

Water is optional and can be offered in an open cup while your baby is eating.

If you introduce cow's milk, wait until nine to 12 months before giving whole/homogenized milk (3.25% milk fat) as the main milk source. Remember that breastmilk can be their main milk source for two years or beyond and can also be offered by cup with meals.

Low-fat milk (1% or 2% milk fat) and plant-based beverages like fortified soy beverage are not recommended before 24 months of age.

Avoid fruit juice or other beverages.

Enjoy family mealtimes together

Eating with your baby is a great opportunity to role model healthy eating that can have a positive impact on your baby's eating.

Keep mealtimes relaxed

Meals that are stress-free and without pressure help babies to enjoy family time together and help to develop positive feelings about food and eating.

Avoid distractions

Put away toys and turn off electronic devices (cell phones, tablets, TV) while your baby is eating. This takes away the focus from eating and can have a negative impact on your baby's eating.

Introduce an open cup

Introduce the skill of learning to drink from an open cup. They will need some help at first but just like self-feeding, they will get better with practice.

In addition to offering tap water, you can also offer small amounts of expressed breastmilk or infant formula in an open cup.

If you bottle-feed, offering an open cup often will help to [transition from a bottle](#) to an open cup.

Sippy and spill-free cups

These popular training cups are convenient and help with spills but they do not support your baby's development. If you use these training cups, still offer an open cup at mealtimes to help them learn the unique skill of drinking from an open cup.

Your baby needs vitamin D daily

Not getting enough vitamin D can affect how your baby's bones form. How much to supplement depends on what your baby is drinking because vitamin D is already added to infant formula.

Vitamin D supplement amounts

Breastmilk only = 400 IU vitamin D per day

Mix of breastmilk and infant formula = 400 IU vitamin D per day

Infant formula only = no supplement needed

Care for your baby's gums and teeth

Clean your baby's gums, inside of cheeks and roof of mouth with a clean, soft damp cloth after every meal.

Visit the dentist for their first dental visit by their first birthday and then continue routine check-ups.

As soon as the first tooth appears, brush them gently, at least twice a day, using a small, soft toothbrush and water. If your child is considered to be at risk of developing tooth decay by your dental professional, brush with a rice-grain size amount of fluoridated toothpaste. Floss should be used to clean between all teeth that are touching.

Bowel habits change with solid foods

How often and how much babies poop can vary. While some babies have more than one poop a day, others might have a poop every couple of days.

Starting solid foods can cause normal changes, including making your baby's poops pastier and firmer but will generally still be soft. Their poops will also have more odour.

The colour may be browner and reflect the colour of foods your baby has eaten. Sometimes even pieces of undigested food may appear.

Constipation

If your baby has painful, very large poops or many small, pellet-like poops, you may wonder if they have constipation.

Since constipation can cause stomach pain, bloating, extra gassiness, poor appetite, low energy and crankiness, talk your baby's health care provider if you think they are constipated and to determine a treatment plan. Do not try to make a diagnosis yourself.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For additional nutrition resources and videos, visit york.ca/FeedingKids or UnlockFood.ca

For other York Region Public Health topics related to parenting, visit york.ca/Breastfeeding and york.ca/Parenting

To speak to a registered nurse about parenting, including feeding young children, call York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653, TTY 1-866-252-9933 or through live chat at york.ca/NurseChat

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To speak to a registered dietitian at no cost, call Health Connect Ontario at 8-1-1.

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