



Starting Solid Foods

At about 6 months, your baby needs calories and nutrients from other foods in addition to breast milk or formula. Your baby also needs to learn to chew and to use his hands to feed himself. Large or fast-growing babies will be ready for solid foods before average or smaller-sized babies. Even so, solids are not recommended for any baby younger than 4 months.

When to Start Solid Foods

Watch for physical signs that your baby is ready for solid foods. This is usually around 4 to 6 months. A baby may be ready when he:

- Holds his head steady.
- Sits with support.
- Moves solid food to the back of his mouth with his tongue.
- Is able to turn his head away to show that he is full.

In addition to the outward signs of solid food readiness, several things are happening inside your baby that indicate he is ready for solids. Until about 4 months of age, your baby's digestive system is not fully developed. This is why babies often become allergic to foods that are introduced too early. At about 4 to 6 months, iron that baby has stored since birth begins to run low. The iron in infant cereals adds to the iron from breast milk or iron-fortified formula to keep baby's iron level at a healthy state.

Good Starter Foods

Infant cereals are a good "first" solid food. They have a milky taste and may be thickened to suit your baby.

- Most infant cereals have iron added to them. Iron builds healthy blood and helps to protect your baby from anemia.
- Dry infant cereal in the box costs less and contains more iron than cereal packaged in jars.
- Start your baby on rice, oat or barley cereals. Wheat and mixed cereals may cause an allergic reaction. Wait to add these until after 8 months.
- It is a good idea to continue giving baby cereal until he is 18 months old. It has more iron than other cereals and will help in building your baby's iron stores.



Mixing and Feeding Cereal

When mixing infant cereal for your baby, measure one teaspoon cereal and mix it with two to five tablespoons lukewarm water, formula or breast milk. The cereal should be thin. You can make it thicker as your baby gets older. There is no need to add sugar or other sweeteners to the cereal since an infant does not expect his cereal to taste sweet.

When feeding your baby, put a small amount of cereal on his tongue, or hold the spoon between his lips and let him suck it off the spoon. It's normal for him to try to push the cereal back out of his mouth. He may not take much at first. Continue offering some each day and he will gradually accept more.

Feeding Your Baby

To make feeding time easier and more enjoyable for you and your baby, follow these simple tips.

- Find a time of day when your baby is in a good mood and is not tired.
- Have baby sit up in an infant seat or on your lap.
- Put a little food on the tip of the spoon and place it between baby's lips.
- All solid foods should be fed with a spoon. Your baby needs to learn new textures and flavors by eating solid foods separately. Food in a bottle or in an infant-feeder could cause overfeeding or choking.
- Take your time and do not hurry him. If he is not ready for solids, try again in a week or so.

- His appetite for food will be small at first. He will soon learn that eating from a spoon satisfies him as well as breast milk or formula.
- Learn your baby's signals that he has had enough. He may start to play, blow bubbles, wave his arms, push the spoon away or turn his head. Do not force him to eat more.
- Try one new food for one week before adding another. If your baby has an allergic reaction, such as a rash, diarrhea or vomiting, you will know which food caused it. You should stop that food right away.
- Let your child enjoy the "natural taste" of foods. Sugar, salt and other seasonings should not be added to your baby's food.

Keep Baby's Food Clean and Safe

Feed your baby from a dish rather than from the storage container or baby food jar. Baby's saliva on the spoon carries enzymes that will cause the food to become thin and watery. (The saliva has begun to digest the food and it should not be fed to baby.) Throw away any food left in the dish when your baby is done.

If there is any food left in the jar, cover and refrigerate it right away. It will be safe to use for two days. Store cereal boxes and unopened jars in a safe place. Keep them away from cleaners, drugs, insects, mice, pets and other possible contaminants.

4 to 6 Months

Foods to Use	Suggested Amounts (Varies from baby to baby)
Breast milk OR Iron-fortified formula	24 to 40 ounces, or about 6 to 10 feedings in 24 hours.
Baby cereal may be introduced now	1-4 tablespoons dry baby cereal mixed with water, formula or breast milk, once or twice each day.

Things to Remember

Breast milk or iron-fortified formula is still the most important food for your baby at this age. As solid foods are added, baby's milk intake will decrease a little. However, if the milk intake drops below 24 ounces a day, you may be feeding too much solid food.

Iron and vitamin D supplements may be prescribed. Babies who are fed formula may also need fluoride supplements. Check with your doctor.

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The Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services sponsors two programs that provide nutrition education, healthy foods and referrals. To find out more about WIC (Women, Infants, Children) and CSFP (Commodity Supplemental Food Program), call 1-800-942-1171.

Alternate formats are available upon request. Please contact the Nebraska WIC Program, Family Health Division, Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services at (402) 471-2781, TDD (402) 471-9570.
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