

Breast to Bowl: Introducing Baby's First Foods

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The introduction of certain foods at certain times is relative to the maturity of the digestive system. Children less than six months need only breast milk, not solids, as the infant's digestive system is not developed to maturation. If you start sooner, you may cause your child future food allergies. Since your child's taste buds will not develop until the eighth month, the feeding of your baby should be guided for nutritional purposes, not taste.

At six months of age fruits and vegetables are the best to start with. Fruits are a cleansing food, vegetables a body builder. Each should be introduced slowly, one at a time and for several days to see how the baby responds to each new food and to allow the baby's digestive system to adapt. Avoid berries as they may create an allergic response in some infants. Peaches, apples, pears cooked and mashed into sauces are great. Citrus fruits can be introduced at a later time.

Bananas are very nutritious although they may be a bit binding; so do not panic if your baby's bowel movements slow down for a day or so. Melons are a great raw fruit because they are watery and easy to mush in the mouth. Very ripe mangos are also a soft starter for toothless chewing. One other note on fruits: it is best not to eat fruits within a half hour of eating any other foods at any age, as they digest quickly and will not allow the other food to be properly assimilated.

The easiest vegetables to start with are: steamed carrots, zucchini, squash, potatoes, sweet potatoes, peas and other easily softened veggies. Again, introduce items separately, giving a few days for your baby to become accustomed to each food. Vegetable juices, especially freshly juiced carrots are wonderful starter foods for your baby. Juicing is also a good way to get fresh, raw greens into your baby. All juices should be cut with distilled water or water purified by reverse osmosis purified water. Other bottled water may contain chlorine or fluoride; both are known toxins.

Introduce fruit juices with caution. The juice should be diluted: one-third juice, two-thirds water; the type mentioned above. Remember that a high content of fructose (natural sugar) may be too much of an over load for your child's system. Any fruit juices should be of the type found in natural food stores because they are not from concentrate. Concentrated juices have high sugar content and are a known cause of candidas (yeast infection) in children. Another great drink for children is herbed tea. Served with natural sweeteners (see below) and at room temperature, they are refreshing and tasty.

Grains are not advisable until your baby has teeth. At the same age babies get their teeth they start to secrete salivary amylase (ptyalin), which is essential for digesting carbohydrates. Before that, children can have problems digesting carbohydrates, thus they become 'gassy'. The food goes into the intestine, where it ferments and putrifies. Of course when grains are introduced they should be whole grains like brown rice, barley, oats and millet. An easy preparation is to blend the raw grain into tiny bits and then cook it, usually two parts water to one part grain. It makes for a wholesome cream of rice type of meal.

Avoid wheat right away, as many children are sensitive to it. Do not feed your child white flour products. White flour (bread, pasta) has gone through a bleaching process, which leaves little to no nutritional value in the product. Pastas are mostly made from processed wheat flour and tend to clog the bowels. When you start with "bread" products, sprouted breads are much healthier than traditional flour breads. A great whole grain snack is rice-cakes.

In addition to grains, other protein foods for babies can be: cooked chickpeas or adzuki beans. Both are mild and are great finger foods...babies love to participate in the messy process of eating. Tofu, cut into tiny little chunks, sautéed in olive oil with a touch of tamari sauce is easy to prepare and fun for self-

feeding. Brown rice miso soup is also a simple, very nutritious food with protein. Almond butter, cashew butter and sesame butter are terrific sources of protein. Peanut butter is the hardest to digest and most brands are filled with added oil and sugar. Additionally, peanuts are highly allergenic.

Sugar and artificial sweeteners are not good for your baby (soft drinks, cookies, candies, ice cream, etc.). Sugars will only increase your child's susceptibility to hyper activity, lower resistance levels (colds), or slow growth rates. Also, avoid honey as a sweetener before the age of one, it has been known to cause botulism. Natural maple, or brown rice syrups are safer and quite sweet. When using salt to enhance your cooking, sea salt or tamari sauce are much healthier than the table salt.

Also avoid all milk products including yogurt until after age one. (You may consider avoiding them altogether!) Dairy products are mucus producing. They often create allergic responses in babies. Additionally, they are also loaded with hormones and antibiotics, two ingredients your baby can do without. Rice milk, almond milk and soymilk are much better substitutes (sometimes soy may cause an allergic response as can milk, so start slowly). If you are overly concerned about calcium intake, sesame butter is very high in its calcium content.

Keep in mind, jarred baby food is as good as junk food or fast food, so preparations from scratch are best. Baby food manufacturers make the food to please the parents' tastes. Baby food has harmful chemicals like MSG (flavor enhancer). Baby food is 60% water. In meat products, it has five times the salt. Strained vegetables have 60 times the salt too. Your infant's taste buds are not developed until the eighth month. The baby food has only been created to meet your taste, not the nutritional needs of your baby. Remember, the baby food industry is the second largest food industry in the United States. Once your baby gets used to the whole eating adventure, you can get a little baby food grinder and start giving him or her what you eat.

Whether you are vegetarians or not, you may want to consider holding off serving meat until twelve months of age. It takes several days for the intestines to fully digest meat. With a newly functioning digestive system, this can be a stress overload. Also, the meat can be loaded with hormones and antibiotics (the harm may outweigh the benefit). Better sources of protein are available in many other foods. When you do introduce meats, organic meats are preferable, as these animals have been raised on organically grown grains without pesticides and additives. Typically, the animals are also hormone and antibiotic free. In the fish family, use a mild white fish. Shellfish is not as healthy and is known to cause allergic reactions. If you choose to introduce eggs, watch closely for signs of allergy as eggs are hyper allergenic. Children with egg allergies should not be given certain vaccinations (MMR is grown on egg cultures).

Just because your child is beginning to eat solids is no reason to hurry the weaning process. The average weaning time around the world is at 3 years of age. If that seems too long to you, consider this; your child's immune system is under developed until about 18 months of age. Mother's milk infers natural passive immunity, and contains all of the ingredients for the immune system of your child (B & T Lymphocytes, macrophages, lysosomes etc.). The baby can digest the protein in this milk. Also breast milk will cause the stool to have a unique enzyme that destroys the bacteria involved in diaper rash. In addition to the physiological benefits, nursing your baby provides an emotional bond that is beyond substitute.

Take your time introducing new foods and allow your baby to go at his/her own pace. Children have an innate sense for survival and if only good foods are introduced in their early years, they will soon be telling you what they need. Along with your choices for infant nutrition, keep in mind that the regular chiropractic adjustments remove interference to your child's vital nervous system and allow his/her body to function at its best. Follow your intuition as parents when making health choices for your children; often these insights are our most valuable resource for well-being.