



## Starting Solid Foods In Infants

Usually by 4 months of age, parents start getting pressure from grandparents and other relatives to start their baby on solid food. The current recommendation by the American Academy of Pediatrics is to start babies on solids at 6 months. The reason for this is that studies clearly show a *decreased* risk of food and environmental allergies (i.e. hay fever) if solids are not introduced too early. In fact, it appears that waiting too long can be as bad as starting too early so the window of opportunity is actually 5 to 7 months. For most full term babies who don't have any symptoms of food allergies or a strong family history of allergies, 5 months is fine. For ex-preemies or babies with risk factors for allergies, waiting until 6 months is best.

In general, it is recommended that you start with rice cereal—this is the grain with the lowest potential of causing allergies. All of the baby cereals (rice, oat, barley, mixed) are fortified with iron and other minerals which becomes a significant source of these nutrients in the second half of their first year. What makes rice interesting for adults to eat is the texture more than the flavor. When you take away the fine texture of rice, you are kind of left with “glue”. Babies often will get bored with this after a week or so. At this point you can add or switch to oat cereal. It tastes a bit more like oatmeal and is also a bit less constipating.

After doing the rice and then oat cereals for a week or two, it is time to start fruits and vegetables. You will get many conflicting ideas about what order to start these in. Many people have very strong opinions about how to do this; none of them are wrong. Some people will tell you to start veggies before fruits. Some will say the opposite. Some will tell you to give yellow veggies before green veggies and so on. The truth is that there is no science behind these recommendations and that really you cannot do this incorrectly. In general I usually tell people to alternate which categories of foods you start but give 2-3 days between each new item. That way if your child has some kind of a reaction (a rash, vomiting, or diarrhea) you can tell what food might be causing it. If you start multiple foods simultaneously, there is no way to tell.

Most people start by giving solid foods around dinnertime. The idea is that if you fill the baby's stomach up with a heavy, solid food, it will sit like concrete and the baby will sleep better. This may or may not be true. Giving the extra calories during the day, may have more to do with a baby sleeping longer at night then specifically when they get the calories. Feel free to feed your baby at dinner but if he or she seems more interested at another time then try the time when they are more interested in eating.

I get a lot of questions about ‘the recipe’ for mixing the cereal (i.e. how much cereal/liquid to use). It is kind of like how I make pancakes. Put some of the flakes in a bowl and add some formula or breast milk. If it’s too thick, then add more liquid, if it’s too runny then add more cereal. How much to feed your baby? A good starting point is about a quarter cup of cereal. If they want more—give them more. If they are eating more than you could put away, it’s probably too much.

Lastly, a tip from personal experience: it takes 3 spoons to feed a baby. If you start with one, they’ll grab it from you. When you get another, they’ll grab that with their other hand. Once your baby’s hands are both full of spoons, you can get one for you to hold and feed them with.

A few basic principles:

1. **You can’t do this wrong.** Really. Everything you hear is fine.
2. **Eating is fun.** If your baby seems stressed by this then maybe they are not ready. Wait a week or two.

Watch and see how your child is responding to the solid food and then adjust your pace accordingly. If they don’t seem too excited about things then take it slow. If they inhale the food like you should be using a funnel rather than a spoon then go a bit faster and then increase to twice a day feeds when they seem ready.

If any concerns develop, then ask me.

Enjoy and Bon Appetite!

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