

## INTRODUCING SOLID FOODS

Starting solids foods is a remarkable advancement for your baby. The incredible new sensory experiences, the social interaction with the feeding parent, and the nutritional contributions from solid foods are an important and exciting transition into a new stage for both baby and parents. Traditional guidelines on the types of foods introduced at certain ages have changed significantly over the past several years. We have updated our suggestions to reflect the current research and recommendations.

### When Do I Start Solids?

- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends between the ages of 4-6 months.

*Evidence shows that starting solids before 4 months and after 6 months may increase the chance of food allergies and diabetes. This means the ideal time is between 4 and 6 months.*

- Look for cues from your infant. Is the baby interested in what you are eating? Can she hold her head up steady? Can he sit with some assistance?

### *Here are some guidelines*

- Always feed solids with a spoon and while your child is in supported upright positioning —this prevents choking.
- It is going to be messy- don't fret- this is part of the pleasure.
- Try giving the baby his own spoon to hold while you feed, the so-called "2 spoon technique." It may take some time for the baby to master this skill and, naturally, even longer to understand what it means.
- Early introduction of solids by spoon or by bottle will not help your baby sleep through the night. We do not recommend feeding your baby solids from a bottle unless specifically instructed by your doctor.
- Remember, this is not a significant part of your baby's nutrition for a while; breast milk and/or formula is still their most important food.

### A Few Words on Allergies

- Food allergies typically present as difficulty breathing, hive like rash, vomiting, and/or severe diarrhea, rarely with blood in the stool. Localized rashes around the mouth or on the bottom may be due to the irritating nature of some foods, but is usually not true allergy.
- Recent studies show that it may be better to feed allergenic foods early rather than later. *Yes, you heard that right!* Unless you know your child is allergic a specific food or you have a very significant family history of severe food allergy, it is OK to feed them wheat, egg, milk products, nut butters, seafood, and any kind of fruit at any time after starting solids. *Make sure that the food is in a form the baby can swallow and not in a form that could cause them to choke such as whole grapes or a teaspoon of peanut butter.*
- We generally recommend waiting 3-5 days between introducing each new food, so that if there is a reaction or allergy to something, it will be easier to tell which food caused the problem. However, if you don't have a family history of food allergies and your child doesn't have eczema or other signs of allergies, it may not be necessary.
- If you see signs of possible allergy, write down what it looks like and the foods you gave over the previous day and we can talk about it at your next office visit. We'll probably recommend avoiding those foods for a few weeks and then reintroducing them one by one to identify the food that may be the cause. We may even do some blood tests to look for evidence of a specific allergy, although they are not always accurate in young children. ***If you think your baby is having a severe reaction with difficulty breathing, call 911 immediately.***

### **Which Food Do I Start With?**

- Traditionally you start with simple, basic foods such as rice cereal. However, there is no medical evidence that introducing solid foods in any particular order has an advantage for your baby. Therefore you can start with almost anything- cereal, vegetables, fruit, or meats, and as they get older and better at eating solids, yogurt, legumes, homemade soups—it just needs to be pureed to a liquid consistency (as babies get older you can make it thicker and even chunky). Try to avoid salt, but you can use healthy oils (olive oil is the best).
- Many pediatricians recommend against giving eggs and fish in the first year of life because of allergic reactions, but there is no evidence that introducing these nutrient-dense foods after 4 to 6 months of age determines whether your baby will be allergic to them.
- As babies head into the second half of the first year, they often need extra iron which is adequate in most formulas and available through meats and beans. We will often recommend an infant vitamin with iron after 4 months.
- One recent study suggests that the early introduction of gluten may actually reduce the likelihood of developing celiac disease (gluten intolerance/allergy) which is usually inherited, but may not be known to the family. Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye, and barley. If you have questions about this, discuss it with your doctor.

*Here are some guidelines*

- In case the baby does not finish the serving, don't feed directly from the jar.
- Instead, put a single service (2 oz or ice cube sized) in a bowl.
- Once a spoon enters the baby's mouth, it picks up bacteria which you don't want to introduce into the jar because it will make the food spoil faster.

### **Which foods should be avoided?**

- Avoid honey (even as a sweetener) until after 1 year of age.
- Cow's milk should not replace formula until the 1st birthday (but it is okay to have yogurt, cheese, or milk cooked in things) so that there are adequate amounts of essential nutrients.
- Avoid deli meats and hot dogs that contain nitrites, which are very high in salt and may be carcinogenic.
- Avoid choking hazard foods such as nuts, seeds, hot dogs, popcorn, peanut butter, hard/ raw vegetables, grapes, chunks of hard fruits like apple, and hard candies.

### **How much should my baby be eating?**

- In the beginning, feed your infant small serving sizes—even just 1 to 2 small spoonfuls to start. Gradually increase solid foods over the next couple of months.
- Generally a baby is eating solids once or twice a day at 4-6 months
- At 9 month olds most will eat solids 2-3 times a day
- At 1 year old, most are eating solids 4 or 5 times a day, including snacks
- It is important that we monitor your baby's growth which will reflect good nutrition.
- Usually the introduction of solids does not decrease the amount of milk the baby drinks until about 8-9 months.
- When a baby has had enough to eat, they will usually turn away from the spoon, or show a lack of interest in eating more. *Do not force-feed your baby just to finish up the food that is left.*

*Between 7-9 months, introduce new textures*

These foods are less pureed (stages 2 and 3). By 9 months, your baby may be ready for *finger foods*. These are foods that can be picked up by a pincer grasp (thumb-first finger pinch) or, more importantly, chewed between your finger tips. Examples of finger foods might be small cubes of cooked carrot, squash, potato, soft melon, banana, or minced poultry. As they get more skilled at handling these foods, you can try rice, cut up pasta, soft cooked, beans, meats, and so on. Be patient, many babies gag but do not choke when starting solids. They will learn and, remember, it is an important sensory and social experience and can help them develop a healthy connection with their family and develop healthy eating habits.

### *Between 10-12 months, add more table foods*

The amount of formula or breast milk should be decreasing as the amount of solids increases, so that the majority of nutrition comes from solid foods.

### *At 1 year*

- Change over to regular cow's milk (whole milk)—16-20 oz. per day is a reasonable goal although amount and types of dairy preferences vary..
- We may recommend certain nutritional supplements at different times during the first several years of life, especially if your baby is very picky or has certain types of food intolerances. Vitamin D is usually supplemented through the first year and iron may be needed after 3 to 4 months of age. If your baby does not like or cannot tolerate dairy, we may substitute another kind of milk and/or extra calcium. *It is important to talk to your doctor if you are not sure you are feeding your baby a healthy diet.*
- They usually eat 5 small meals a day, including snacks.
- Implementing healthy eating habits at this age will benefit your child for the rest of their life.

### **Breastfeeding**

- You may find that the number of breast feedings will gradually decrease as solid-food intake increases. A baby who nursed every two to three hours during early infancy may only want two or three breast feeds per day, usually first thing in the morning and in the evening.
- To ease breast discomfort, it may become necessary to express a small amount of milk manually on occasion, if her decreasing demand leaves you with an oversupply.

### **Water and Juice**

- Once solids are under way, you start a small amount of water. Don't worry about the quantity; let your baby decide how much to drink.
- We usually try to introduce water in a cup, although some may prefer a bottle, especially prior to age six months.
- Fluoridated water is important for the teeth. Most filters (Brita/charcoal) will not remove the fluoride from tap water.
- Avoid juice if you can, or at least limit the amount of juice to less than 4 oz./day, diluted with water; there is limited nutritional value in juice- it's best to get the nutrients and vitamins from the fruit itself.