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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 your baby interested in what you are eating? Can he/she hold head up steady? 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 your baby a spoon to hold while you feed, the so-called "2 spoon technique." It may take some time for your baby to master this skill and, naturally, even longer to understand what it means.
- Early introduction of solids (before 4 months old) 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 the most important food.

Which Food Do I Start With?

- Traditionally, parents have started 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 your baby gets 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 such as olive oil.
- In the past, 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. (See section on food allergies)
- 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 for exclusively breastfed babies after 4 months until iron-rich foods are started.

- 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.

How much should my baby be eating?

- In the beginning, feed your infant small serving sizes—even just 1 to 2 small spoonfuls. Gradually increase solid foods over the next couple of months.
- Put a single serving (2 oz or ice cube sized) in a bowl for each feeding. Do not feed directly from a container you will later use for storage. Once a spoon enters the baby's mouth, it picks up bacteria which will make the food spoil faster.
- Generally, your baby will be eating solids once or twice a day at 4-6 months.
- At 9 month old, most babies will eat solids 2-3 times a day.
- At 1 year old, most are eating solids 4 or 5 times a day, with 3 meals a day plus snacks between meals.
- 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 your baby drinks until about 8-9 months.
- A baby who has had enough to eat 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.*

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, so that your baby receives adequate amounts of essential nutrients. Milk products such as yogurt, cheese, or baked goods can be given once solids are started.
- Avoid deli meats and hot dogs that contain nitrites, which are very high in salt and generally unhealthy.
- Avoid foods that are choking hazard such as nuts, seeds, hot dogs, popcorn, peanut butter, hard/ raw vegetables, grapes, chunks of hard fruits like apple, and hard candies.

A Few Words on Allergies

- Food allergies typically present as difficulty breathing, a 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 a 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 to a specific food or you have a very significant family history of severe food allergy, it is OK to feed your child 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 choking, 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.*

How do I transition to table food?

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 the finger-tips. Examples of finger foods are small cubes of cooked carrot, squash, potato, soft melon, banana, and minced poultry.
- As your child becomes more skilled at handling these foods, you can try rice, soft cooked and cut-up pasta, beans, meats, and so on. Be patient, many babies gag but do not choke when starting solids. They will eventually learn to master the skill of chewing and swallowing. It is an important sensory and social experience that will help to develop healthy eating habits and a healthy connection with your family.

Between 10-12 months, add more table foods

- As long as your family has a healthy diet, your baby can now eat anything you eat, as long as it is in a form that is not a choking hazard.
- 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..
- A well-balanced diet including fruits, vegetables, protein, and whole grains should provide all nutrients necessary for your toddler.
- We may recommend certain nutritional supplements at different times during the first several years of life if your child 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 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.*
- Your child should eat 5 small meals a day, including snacks.
- Implementing healthy eating habits at this age will benefit your children 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 your child’s 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.

Care Plan:
