

General Guidelines for Introduction of Solid Food

1. How to minimize food allergies:

- A controlled systematic approach to introduction of solid food makes the possibility of food allergies less likely for your child.
- For the first three months of life your baby should not be given anything other than breast milk or formula unless a physician has instructed you otherwise.
- Depending on your infant's family history of atopic diseases (e.g., asthma, eczema, hay fever) the timing for introduction of solid foods can vary. For patients with a very strong family history of atopy, we encourage early allergen introduction as this has been shown to minimize allergies later in life.
- You should start with the least allergenic, most blended single ingredient foods. Rice is typically very hypoallergenic; therefore, infant's rice cereal is usually the first food introduced. Initially, you should dilute it to a liquid consistency in breast milk, formula, or water.
- In general, test a single ingredient several days in a row, watching for signs of allergic response such as rash, persistent runny nose or sneezing, cough, or bloody diarrhea. Do not test several new foods at the same time so you can identify the problematic food and take it out of the diet for ~1 month. On the other hand, you can continue giving foods that have been previously tested while testing a single new ingredient. Juices count as new single ingredient.
- Save the more allergenic foods for later in the year. The typical food allergens are cow's milk, soy, egg white, citrus, tomatoes, berries, avocado, corn, wheat, fish, shellfish, and nuts, but your child might show allergies to other foods. Do not test these allergenic foods until approximately the following ages:
 - Age 6-8 months: egg yolks, broths, milk products (e.g., yogurt, cheese)
 - Age 8-10 months: wheat, corn, citrus, tomatoes, soy
 - Age 10-12 months: egg whites, berries, nuts, fish, shellfish
 - Age 12-15 months: honey (infant botulism), regular whole cow's milk

- Many cultures believe in letting babies taste new foods, randomly, typically at family get-togethers. Those “tastes” are just as allergenic; so, do not allow it to happen unless that food has been tested previously in a controlled systematic fashion. Typical allergens that sneak in are extracts of citrus and nuts.

2. How to Feed your child:

- Do not add cereals to bottles
- Eating should be an interesting and enjoyable experience; in other words, do not force it on your child. Also, try not to use food as a reward or punishment.
- As your baby gets used to eating solid foods, you can feed him/her more frequently and ultimately at mealtimes (3 times a day). They will eat better if hungry and in good spirits. When introducing solids, breast milk or formula should come after solid foods.
- Regular eating times and more importantly eating places, e.g., highchairs, help a child’s subconscious get ready for eating. Children tend to eat better if they eat with others around a table at mealtimes.
- As your baby gets older, they will show interest in feeding themselves. As they become more interested, allow them to participate by holding on to a spoon or some other object as you are feeding them. Later give them finger foods to increase their appetite as well as fine-motor skills. As a toddler, allow them to feed themselves, but the choice of food will be yours. As messy as this sounds, they tend to eat better this way.
- As your baby gets older, the texture of the food can get coarser and finger foods may be tried (around 8-9 months). There is a lot of chewing that happens with a baby’s gums, even before they get their molars. Some favorite foods for 8–9-month-olds are rice with a meat or vegetable sauce, noodles, and small pieces of cheese or fruit.
- To avoid choking, have your child seated when eating, no running around. Do not give typical choking foods like whole grapes, hot dogs cut on cross-section, nuts, and popcorn. Cut the foods (e.g., fruits, cooked vegetables) into small pieces.
- Do not give cow’s milk until one year of age, even if your child has tolerated cow’s milk products like cheese and yogurt. This has to do with the amount of protein load in the gut. Giving cow’s milk early may result in GI bleeds.
- Do not give honey until one year of age due to concerns for infant botulism. This occurs from bacterial spores in the honey itself.

- With solid foods your baby can become constipated. The solution is to give more fluids and fiber. This may come from added breast milk or water in purees or free water with adequate intake of solid food. Some foods that alleviate constipation include prunes and pears. Bananas are very constipating, and we typically advise against these if your child has harder stools. Let us know if this remedy is not enough as medications may be indicated for more severe constipation.
- As a toddler your child's growing independence will affect their eating habits. Establishing routines and good habits in the first year of life, will help cut back on feeding difficulties down the line.

Most importantly remember these are general guidelines. Please let us know if you are having any problems.