baby’s first foods
Healthy eating from around 6 months
Healthy eating for your baby and the family

Starting solid food is exciting!

It’s not just about eating healthy food – your baby is learning how to eat and to enjoy food, and to experience new tastes and textures.

These early days will shape her attitudes to food and eating.

GETTING STARTED

At around 6 months, your baby needs more iron and other nutrients than he can get from breastmilk or infant formula.

- Starting solid food before 4 months can increase the risk of allergies.
- Waiting too long after 6 months means your baby may miss out on important nutrients he needs for growing and developing, and may increase the risk of allergies if some foods are avoided.
- Keep breastfeeding while introducing solids.

It’s time to introduce solid food if your baby:

- is around 6 months old
- has good head and neck control, and can sit upright when you support him
- seems interested in food – reaching out for food when you’re eating
- opens his mouth when you offer him food
- takes pureed food from a spoon without pushing it out of his mouth with his tongue
- looks for more food after a breastfeed or formula feed.

Every baby is different.

If you are having problems or if you aren’t sure if your baby is ready for solid foods, talk to your child health nurse or doctor.
How do I start?
Pick a time when you and your baby are happy and relaxed.
- Your baby (and you) will enjoy it more if sitting comfortably and supported, and not too tired or hungry.
- Use a soft, plastic spoon.
- Start with small tastes of food after a breastfeed or formula feed.

Your baby is probably hungry when she:
- is excited when she sees food
- leans forward towards you when sitting
- opens her mouth, ready to be fed.

Your baby is probably not interested in eating when she:
ᵦ turns her head away
ᵦ is distracted and not interested
ᵦ pushes the spoon away
ᵦ firmly closes her mouth.
Preparing baby’s food
Cook vegetables, fruit, meat and chicken or meat alternatives in a little water or baby’s milk.
Don’t add sugar, salt or processed seasoning.
To puree foods, use a blender or mash the food through a sieve.

What food?
Start with foods that are high in iron:
- iron-enriched baby cereals
- pureed meat or chicken
- cooked tofu
- legumes (beans, peas and lentils).

After this, you can introduce new food in any order, and more than 1 new food at a time. It’s OK to mix different food together. Try to give your baby homemade food if you can.
This is also a good time to think about your own diet – and make some healthy changes.
Offer a variety of foods from the Five Food Groups:

1. vegetables/legumes/beans
2. fruit
3. grain (cereal) foods
4. lean meat/poultry/fish/eggs/tofu
5. milk/yoghurt/cheese

You can read more about these on page 10.

Tip
Store homemade food in ice cube trays (with a cover), in small sealed containers or in bags in the fridge or freezer.
Dairy food
Full cream cow’s milk, cheese and yoghurts are best until your baby turns 2, then you can offer low fat varieties.

Vegetarian diet
If you are feeding your child a vegetarian diet, talk to your nurse, doctor or a dietitian to make sure they are getting all the nutrients they need.

How much food and when?
■ Once a day, start with a teaspoon of iron-rich food after a breastfeed or formula feed. Mix the food with your baby’s milk or boiled water into a smooth paste.
■ Introduce a variety of foods, moving from pureed → smooth → mashed → soft pieces.
■ Gradually increase the amount from 1 or 2 teaspoons up to 2 or 3 tablespoons, according to your baby’s appetite.
■ Start with 1 meal and gradually increase the amount. By 8 months, your baby should be having 3 meals.
■ Once your baby is eating a variety of foods, offer food before your baby breastfeeds.

Babies know when they are full or hungry, so it is important for you to recognise your baby’s hunger and full ‘signs’.

What drinks?
■ Breastmilk for the first year, and as long as you want after that.
■ Lots of cooled, boiled tap water from 6 months (from a cup).
■ If baby has formula, stop using it at 12 months.
■ Full cream cow’s milk from 12 months (from a cup).

Start with a sippy cup with a lid, but work towards no lid as soon as possible. Avoid cups with valves.
Continued use of bottles is linked to tooth decay.
Modified from the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from these five food groups every day.

Drink plenty of water.

Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high fibre varieties

Vegetables and legumes/beans

Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legumes/beans

Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat

Fruit

Use small amounts
Textures
It is important to offer lots of different tastes and textures, suitable for your baby’s stage of development.
- Start off with smooth or pureed foods.
- Once your baby is used to that texture, quickly move on to mashed, followed by lumper foods.
- At around 8 months, your baby will be ready to eat diced, chopped, soft strips and finger foods.

Textured foods help your baby to chew. This helps develop the muscles used for talking.
- Don’t worry if your baby has no or few teeth. He can chew mashed and finely diced food with his gums.
- Don’t worry if your baby ‘gags’ – it’s a natural reflex to avoid choking. It’s also a normal response to a new texture.
- Offer foods your baby can pick up. As your baby develops, he will start wanting to feed himself.
- Don’t worry if your baby spits out food. Learning to eat takes time and patience. If your baby doesn’t like a type of food, try it again some other time. You might have to offer it many times before your baby accepts the new taste or texture.

Tips
- Be relaxed.
- Talk to your baby about the food he’s eating. Look into his eyes, and make sure there are no distractions. Turn off the TV and other screens.
- Sit your baby with the family at meal times so he can watch, learn and join in.
- It will be messy! Put newspaper or plastic under the high chair.
- Be prepared for a change in your baby’s poo! Different foods create different coloured poo.

Commercial baby food
- Commercial baby food (in a jar or a pouch) can be handy when travelling or in an emergency.
- It’s not a good idea to use them a lot – your baby can get used to the taste and smooth texture of these foods.
- With home-cooked food, you are giving your baby lots of variety in taste and texture, and it’s a lot cheaper.
Do not give your baby:

- **honey**
  The bacteria in honey can make babies sick – don’t give her honey until she is 1 year old.

- **raw eggs and raw meat**
  The bacteria in raw eggs and meat can make babies sick. Cooked eggs and meat are OK.

- **salt and sugar**
  Your baby doesn’t need salt, sugar, or processed flavours added to her food. She has sensitive tastebuds, so will enjoy her food just as it is.

- **these drinks:**
  - cow’s milk/goat’s milk (at least until she’s 1 year old)
  - soy drinks (unless under doctor’s advice)
  - alternative ‘milk’ such as rice, oat, coconut and almond milk
  - follow-on toddler formula (these are not necessary)
  - fruit juice – these have lots of sugar and can cause tooth decay and reduce your baby’s appetite. They can also cause an upset tummy or runny poos.
  - soft drinks, cordials, flavoured milk – these have lots of sugar, and can cause obesity and tooth decay
  - energy drinks – these contain guarana and caffeine which are not safe for babies or children
  - tea, herbal tea – the tannin in tea can affect how your baby absorbs iron
  - coffee, cola – the caffeine in coffee and cola is not safe for babies or children.
**Prevent choking**

**Always watch carefully when your baby is eating.**

- Don’t let your baby move, crawl or walk with food in his mouth.
- Babies and young children can choke on food that is small, hard, round or sticky.
- Remove small bones and gristle from meat, chicken and fish.
- Remove the skin from sausages. (Sausages are not recommended for babies as they are high in salt and fat.)
- Cook, then grate or mash all hard fruit and vegetables like apples, carrots and beans.

**Babies can easily get very sick from food poisoning.**

It is important to keep your baby’s food safe.

- Wash your hands before preparing food.
- Wash your baby’s hands before eating.
- Clean utensils and work surfaces.
- Use separate chopping boards and utensils when preparing raw food and ready-to-eat foods.
- Use clean spoons, cups, bowls and plates.
- Wash all fruit and vegetables.
- Store prepared food in a sealed container in the fridge or freezer.
- Always store raw meat in containers or wrap in the BOTTOM of the fridge so raw meat juices can’t drip onto other foods.
- Re-heat pre-prepared food really well, and then cool it down, before giving it to your baby.
- Never re-heat food more than once.
- Never keep food that your baby has dribbled on.
- Keep pets away from food and food preparation surfaces.

**Alert**

**Watch for:**

- swelling of face, eyes or lips hives or welts (red lumps on the skin)
- vomiting and diarrhoea
- rashes or redness of the skin.

**Call an ambulance**

if your baby has these severe reactions to any food:

- difficult or noisy breathing
- swelling of the tongue
- pale skin and floppy.

**Allergies**

Please talk to your doctor if you are worried about allergies, particularly if your baby already has severe eczema or food allergy, or other members of your families have allergies.

Even if some family members have food allergies, you don’t need to delay starting solids foods, or not offer some types of foods to prevent allergies.

In fact, delaying or avoiding some foods can increase the risk of your baby developing an allergy.

From 6 months, you can offer your baby cooked egg, smooth nut pastes (including peanuts and tree nuts), wheat, cow’s milk (in cooking), sesame, fish and shell fish at regular intervals.

Some food can irritate the skin around the mouth or cheeks as your baby’s skin is very sensitive. This includes citrus, tomatoes and berries – this is not a food allergy.

Some babies are allergic to some foods. Most symptoms of food allergy are mild to moderate.
Feeding your baby: the first 12 months

the first 6 months

- breastmilk
- commercial infant formula

at about 6 months, offer some solid foods.

- start with iron-rich foods
- try new foods in any order
- smooth puree → mashed foods (mash with a fork)
- cooled boiled tap water in a cup
- start with a teaspoon after their milk feed
- increase when your baby is ready to eat more

at about 8 months

- thicker/chunkier food → finely chopped food → finger foods
- babies like to feed themselves
- about 3 meals a day
- cooled boiled tap water in a cup

at 9 to 12 months

- lots of different foods and textures
- sit with the family to eat family foods (baby will like to self-feed)
- cooled boiled tap water in a cup
- about 5 small meals a day
- learning to eat is messy!
When to get help

Contact your child health nurse or doctor if:

- you are worried about your child’s growth
- your child is unwell, tired and not eating
- mealtimes are causing a lot of family stress and anxiety.

For more information contact

- HealthyWA
  www.healthywa.wa.gov.au
- Local child health nurse
- Local family doctor
- Ngala Parenting Line (8am–8pm everyday)
  (08) 9368 9368 (Outside metro 1800 111 546)
  www.ngala.com.au
- Raising Children Network
  www.raisingchildren.net.au
- Kidsafe WA (9am–4.30pm weekdays)
  (08) 6244 4880 (Outside metro 1800 802 244)
  www.kidsafewa.com.au
- Eat for Health
  www.eatforhealth.gov.au

We’ve used ‘he’ and ‘she’ in turn – please change to suit your child.

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.