

ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS Crib Sheet



WHAT TO KNOW: STARTING YOUR BABY ON SOLID FOODS

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Blog: Simply Baby Food Recipes



GETTING A SOLID START

Your baby will probably let you know that he is ready for solids at around 5 months old, but don't feel like a bad parent if you hold off until 6 months of age. Two signs that your baby is ready for solids: being able to sit up on her own, and opening her mouth when she sees food. According to HealthyChildren.org, babies are generally ready for solids when they reach 13 pounds. Contrary to popular tradition, infant cereal doesn't have to be the first taste. Infant cereals, pureed fruit, or vegetables can be introduced in any order—as long as your pediatrician gives a thumbs-up.

IRON AND FAT ARE NECESSARY

Your baby is born with enough iron, but starting at around 6 months, babies need solid food rich in iron and fat for healthy brain development. Iron-fortified infant cereals such as rice, oatmeal, and barley can help replenish iron stores. Iron deficiency is high among young children, so be sure to include these cereals as a part of a balanced meal for your baby. You can purchase iron-fortified cereal from the store, or make your own by grinding rice, oatmeal, or barley into a fine powder using a food processor or coffee grinder.

FOODS FOR STARTERS

Popular foods to introduce to your baby include infant cereals (rice, oatmeal, barley), avocados, apples, bananas, squash, pears, peas, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, and yogurt made with whole milk. There is no evidence that feeding your baby fruits first will cause her to dislike vegetables, or vice versa. If your baby doesn't seem to like a food, be consistent and continue to offer it, even if you get a frown. It can take up to 20 times for a baby to acquire a taste for it. Fruits, vegetables, and whole grains are essential for a growing child. Set the stage for healthy eating with persistence and consistency—and don't give up!

ONE FOOD AT A TIME, ONE TABLESPOON AT A TIME

Feed your baby single-ingredient foods when starting off, one tablespoon at a time. Your baby may only eat a spoonful at first, and that is perfectly normal. Consider this when preparing food, so you don't overprepare. It's best to feed from a separate feeding dish, so that any leftover food can be stored safely in the refrigerator for 2-3 days. Once your baby has successfully eaten a food for 4-7 days, you can add another single-ingredient food, as long as he shows no signs of food allergies or other concerns. Talk to your pediatrician about what foods are best for your baby.

MAKE YOUR OWN BABY FOOD

Pureeing and freezing your own baby food can save you tons of money and trips to the store. Many first-stage foods can even be mashed with a fork (with a little breast milk or formula) and can be fed on demand. These foods, such as avocado or fully ripe banana, don't require any special appliances. Just mash! Other foods can be cooked and easily pureed with a blender and frozen for up to 8 weeks.

HOW TO CREATE A BALANCED MEAL

Once your baby has been introduced to first-stage foods, it's important to offer a daily combination of foods rich in iron and fat. For example, blending avocado and rice cereal together, or whole milk yogurt and oatmeal cereal together, offers your baby both iron and fat in one meal, as opposed to feeding those ingredients in separate meals. It's important to keep in mind (or in a journal) the foods your baby has been fed so far, and you can use that list to plan accordingly.

SKIP THE HONEY

Nowadays, health-conscious moms and dads are finding ways to sweeten food with honey, a natural sweetener with amazing health benefits. However, giving an infant honey can cause a potentially fatal condition called infant botulism. This condition can produce a dangerous toxin in the intestinal tract. Never, ever, ever, add honey to your baby's meals until after her first birthday. Symptoms of infant botulism include constipation, floppy movements, weakness, and difficulty sucking or feeding. Seek medical attention immediately if your baby has been exposed to honey and displays symptoms.

ENCOURAGE A LOVE FOR THE HEALTHY STUFF

If you want your little one to grow to love the things that are good for her, don't expose her to things that are ultimately not good—such as refined sugar and processed foods. It sounds impossible, but it can be done. For the first few years of your child's life, make a commitment to feed your baby only whole foods, including vegetables, fruit, lean protein, and whole grains. Make everything from scratch if you can, and only purchase super-healthy snacks that do not contain refined sugars, additives, food chemicals, or artificial ingredients, to name a few. Keep it natural, simple, and organic, and you will encourage your child to make healthy choices in the long run.

BUY ORGANIC

Organic produce does not contain harmful chemicals and pesticides, which may be found in conventional (non-organic) produce. Always purchase apples, peaches, strawberries, spinach, and blueberries organic to avoid exposing your child to these chemicals; FoodNews.org is a helpful resource that provides a helpful tip sheet about the top foods to purchase organic and the reasons why. If you're not making your own food, consider commercially prepared organic baby food. Don't forget to look for the USDA Certified Organic label.

