

Baby Food Frequently Asked Questions

Question 1: Is breastfeeding really better than formula feeding?

Answer 1: Yes, breastfeeding is good for both baby and mom. There are lots of benefits:

- Helps to protect babies from sickness and allergies;
- Breast milk has the right balance of nutrients for infant growth;
- Breastfeeding promotes the bond of mother and child;
- Breast milk can promote healthy brain development;
- Breast milk is much less expensive than buying formula.

Question 2: When should I start feeding my baby solid food?

Answer 2: Health Canada recommends that babies should start eating solid food once they're 6 months old. Around this time, infants will begin requiring more nutrients than just breast milk or formula can provide, such as iron. They also begin developing the physical skills to start eating and they become interested in trying the foods they see you eating.

But, not all babies are the same. Some babies can start sooner and some should wait a little before starting solid foods. Some signs that your child is ready to eat solid food are if he or she:

- Can sit up on their own, with little support;
- Seems interested in what others are eating;
- Opens their mouth to accept food when offered;
- Is able to take food from a spoon and close lips over the spoon;
- Is able to turn head away to show it doesn't want any more food.

If your child is close to 6 months old and able to do these actions, then it may be time to start introducing solid foods. If your child is older than 6 months and not ready to start eating solid foods, hold off and just be patient. Some infants will take longer to develop so try not to rush your child. If you are concerned, speak to your family doctor or other medical expert.

Question 3: What are unsafe foods to offer my child?

Answer 3: Since infants are still learning how to eat, there are some foods they should not eat. Foods that may stick to the roof of their mouths, hard foods, or foods that can cause choking should all be avoided until children are at least 4 years old. Foods to avoid include:

- Popcorn;
- Whole grapes, raisins;
- Hot dogs, meat with bones;

- Hard candy, gum;
- Peanuts, nuts and seeds;
- Hard raw fruits or vegetables.

Since infants have an undeveloped immune system, infants under one year of age should avoid honey and corn syrup because they can easily contain bacteria and cause illness.

Question 4: What is the order I should use when feeding solid foods?

Answer 4: When beginning to feed solid foods, two important factors are: the type of food and the texture of the food. Remember to wait at least 2-3 days before introducing new foods to detect any possible allergic reactions.

At about 6 months or once infants are ready to start eating solid foods, infants should be introduced to iron-rich or iron-fortified foods. These foods will need to be a watery puree, with the texture of watered-down pudding. Meat and iron-fortified cereals are good sources of iron and are good foods to start feeding to children. This is also a good time to begin introducing vegetables, fruits, and some grain products.

Once infants have started eating solid foods, foods should progress to being soft, minced, and only slightly lumpy. Foods may be finely diced or have the consistency of tapioca pudding.

Dairy products such as yogurt and cheese can be introduced around 9 months. The texture of foods can be coarser, bite-sized, and include finger foods.

After 1 year, whole (3.25%) cow's milk should be introduced.

This feeding schedule is flexible and varies from child to child. As children develop, they will show signs of the types of foods they are ready to eat. Not noticing these signs can delay the introduction of food and can cause delays in food acceptance and child development. You can use this table from the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region to see what texture foods should have:

Your Baby's Development	Food Texture
Sits without support	Pureed, semi-solid foods; Soft mashed foods without lumps
Crawls	Soft mashed foods with tiny lumps
Walks	Coarsely chopped or diced foods, bite size family food

Question 5: What are benefits of store-bought baby food? The limitations?

Answer 5: Commercial baby foods offer speed and convenience to parents trying to offer solid foods to their infant. They can also be easy to store and transport.

However, commercial baby foods have limited texture, appearance, and flavours. There is less variety and parents are restricted to the types of baby food sold in stores near them. These baby foods may also often be filled with fillers and thickeners. Water is a common ingredient which causes the baby food to be diluted and have fewer nutrients.

Question 6: Why make my own baby food?

Answer 6: The decision whether to buy or make baby food is that of the parents. Homemade food has several advantages over store-bought baby food. Making your own baby food gives you more control over the ingredients in the food itself. You can also have more variety in the types of foods you can offer your child than what can normally be found in stores. For example, foods that are traditional or culturally important can be used, but are unlikely to be found in a grocery store. Other benefits are that homemade baby foods look and taste much better than store bought foods. They are also surprisingly easy to make, can be stored for later use, and can help your child learn what fresh food tastes like. Homemade foods are also less expensive than purchased foods and produce less waste.

Question 7: What equipment do I need to make my own baby food?

Answer 7: There are many tools that vary in price that can be used to make baby food. These include simple utensils like forks, knives, and spoons, or more complex appliances such as food processors, blenders, ovens, and freezers. For basic food preparation and storage, here are some equipment tips for beginners:

- Utensils: forks can be used to mash soft foods, knives and potato mashers for making small portions, and spoons for feeding your child;
- Food processors and blenders can be used to puree harder foods such as potatoes, carrots, and meats;
- Small baby food mills are great alternatives for making baby food from vegetables, fruits, pulses and meats. They can be found at most baby supply stores or at CHEP for around \$20;
- Various cooking appliances such as microwaves, stoves, ovens, and slow cookers can be used to cook and soften foods and also make them taste better. Water used to cook or boil foods can be re-used to help puree foods;

- Ziploc bags, saran wrap, aluminum foil, and ice cube trays are all useful tools for storing leftover baby food. It's convenient to make lots of baby food at once, and it's also easy to store extra baby food in the fridge or freezer. Remember to allow time for frozen food to thaw and that refrigerated food should be thrown out after 3 days

Question 8: When offering solid foods, how much should I offer?

Answer 8: There is no set amount. Parents will have to learn their child's cues to tell when their child is full or still hungry. Your baby is learning to eat so it is important to let them take control and to let them start slowly. When your child wants to eat they may become excited and open their mouth to accept food. Remember that it may still take many tries before the child will accept a new food. A baby who is full may:

- Close its mouth and turn away from food;
- Lose interest in eating and be distracted by its surroundings;
- Spit up while eating;
- Fall asleep.

It is important not to force your baby to finish eating even though they're full. Overfeeding may cause feeding difficulties in the future and may cause excess weight gain.

You can use this table from the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region to see how many times a day you should be offering solids:

Your Baby's Development	How Often to Offer
Sits without support	2-3 times a day
Crawls	3-4 times a day
Walks	3 meals and 2 snacks a day

Question 9: When can I start feeding my baby finger foods?

Answer 9: Finger foods should be introduced around 7-9 months. Around this time, infants begin developing motor skills like being able to grab food with a pincer grasp and bring it to their mouth. It is a time where children learn to eat without the direct help of parents. When making your own baby food, avoid adding sugar, salt, or fat.

Here are some examples of safe finger foods:

- Soft, peeled, seedless fruit such as bananas, pears, peaches;
- Cooked, cut vegetables;

- Shredded cheese or small cheese cubes;
- Unsweetened cereals such as Cheerio's;
- Cooked, ground meat;
- Cooked peas and beans.

Question 10: When should I stop breastfeeding?

Answer 10: Even after solid foods have been introduced at about 6 months, breastfeeding should continue. Breast milk or formula should be the main source of energy and nutrition for the first year. Solid foods that are introduced are complimentary and help infants develop. Mothers may breastfeed or use formula for up to 2 years or longer as desired. Continue to breastfeed on cue during this time. As the child grows, breast milk becomes less necessary and is instead used to compliment the solid foods being eaten. Often around the age of 2 or 3, children will be ready to stop breastfeeding and need only solid foods.

Question 11: Why are iron-rich foods important?

Answer 11: Iron is a very important nutrient. It helps with growth and brain development. Around 6 months, babies begin running out of the iron stores they got from their mother during pregnancy. Solid foods should include good iron sources to ensure healthy growth by preventing iron-deficiency anemia. Iron-deficiency anemia is due to a lack of iron and can cause infants to be tired, pale and have poor growth. Iron rich foods that can prevent this include:

- Beef, chicken, turkey;
- Boneless fish;
- Egg yolk;
- Iron fortified infant cereals;
- Legumes such as beans, lentils, and chickpeas.

Both plants and meats can be iron sources, but iron from meat is better absorbed. Vitamin C can help absorb iron. Some Vitamin C containing foods are:

- Broccoli, spinach;
- Oranges, mango;
- Tomatoes, squash.

Try combining these foods with iron rich foods to improve iron absorption. Many juices are fortified with Vitamin C, but the general recommendation is to limit the amount of juice your child drinks.

Question 12: Can some foods cause allergies? How do I protect my baby?

Answer 12: Health Canada's current findings are that specific foods do not need to be avoided to prevent food allergies. Avoiding foods such as peanuts, egg whites, and soy protein has not been proven to decrease the risk of developing allergies. But, feeding solid foods before 6 months or having a family history of allergies can increase the risk of developing food allergies. Many infants can outgrow their allergies, but they may be permanent for others.

To protect your child from allergic responses, follow these recommendations:

- When introducing solid foods, only try one new food at a time;
- Wait 2-3 days between introducing new foods to make sure there were no allergic reactions;
- Allergic reactions can include breathing problems, skin rashes, swelling, and diarrhea. To find out if your child has a true allergy, speak to your family doctor. If the reaction is severe, call 911;
- If a food is found to cause an allergic reaction it is best to confirm with a test performed by a physician.

Question 13: Is my child having a reaction to solid food?

Answer 13: When starting to eat solid foods, some babies react differently than others. This can be due to individual differences between infants but can also be caused by the types of foods they're eating. Sometimes during feeding, babies will cough, gag, or spit up their food. This is normal for most infants as they are still learning how to chew and swallow correctly. These responses may also happen if a child is developing slowly.

Speak with your doctor if reactions to foods such as rashes, nausea, diarrhea, and swelling occur in response to something the child has eaten.

Other reactions to pay attention to are constipation and diarrhea. Baby's stools will change when they begin to consume solid foods – don't panic. Often stools will go from being very soft to being harder when baby begins eating solids, this is completely normal. If your baby does have true diarrhea or constipation, they may be caused by too much iron, an infection, or a change in fluid intake. Both conditions can be identified by changes in stool patterns. With diarrhea, stools are often very watery and the child has frequent bowel movements. Fruit juice and soda should be avoided as they can make diarrhea worse. Constipation may show as infrequent bowel movements where baby is straining, with small, hard stools that may contain blood. Firm stools can occur once infants begin eating solid foods as their bodies adapt to new foods and should resolve itself with time.

Question 14: What if my baby is a picky eater?

Answer 14: It is very common and normal for infants to be hesitant to try new foods. Understand that it can take 10 or more tries to get a child to try a new food. It's important to keep trying, but not force the child to try food they aren't ready to eat. The following are a few tips for feeding a picky child:

- Don't force new foods, but do continue to offer them;
- Lead by example. Seeing parents and family eating foods can encourage infants to try new foods;
- Remember that the portion size for a baby is smaller than for adults;
- Never use food as a reward or bribe your children with food;
- If your child is being particularly picky and not growing, see your doctor.

Question 15: Does baby food need to be a certain temperature?

Answer 15: Short answer: no. Long answer: it depends. Commercial and homemade baby food is generally fine to give to your child at room temperature. However, some infants will prefer warm food and will be harder to feed if their food is cold. It all comes down to the baby's personal preference. If you choose to serve heated food to your baby, be careful that the food is not hot enough to injure the child. If using a microwave, make sure to stir food well and check for hot spots before offering to a child.

Question 16: Should my child be drinking water?

Answer 16: Breast milk and formula will usually provide the necessary fluids for younger infants. As infants develop, their water needs will increase. If you think your child is signalling thirst, try offering small amounts of water from a cup during meals or snacks. Also, infants will need more fluids when they're sick or during hot temperatures. Some signs of dehydration include:

- Dark, strange smelling urine;
- Dry lips and mouth;
- Over six hours without a wet diaper;
- Cold hands and feet;
- Excessive sleepiness, sunken eyes.

If your infant shows any of these signs, parents should give small amounts of water to their child and look for any improvement. If these symptoms persist or worsen, parents should see their doctor immediately.

Although most fluids will meet a child's water needs, some options are better than others. Breast milk, formula, and water are the preferred options. Juice should not be given to children less than one year old. Too much juice may cause diarrhea, dehydration, and is linked to other health problems such as tooth decay.

Question 17: Where can I find more information on feeding my child?

Answer 17: Registered dietitians, nurses, and your family doctor can be good sources of information. Phone Robin at (306) 655-5311 for more information. CHEP's website has for links to other reliable websites as well as books which are available at your local public library. A great resource available at libraries in Saskatoon is an educational DVD titled "Feeding Your Baby Solid Foods".

Resources Used

1. Allergy/Asthma Information Association of Canada. (2004). *The Basics of Milk Allergy*,
http://aaia.ca/en/basics_of_milk_allergy.htm
2. Best Start. (Revised 2009). *Feeding Your Baby: From six months to 1 year*,
http://beststart.org/resources/nutrition/pdf/feeding_baby.pdf
3. Brown, Judith E. (2008). *Nutrition Through the Life Cycle*
4. Caring for Kids. (2006). *Feeding your baby in the first year*,
<http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/pregnancy&babies/Feeding.htm>
5. Caring for Kids. (2008). *Dehydration and diarrhea in children: Prevention and treatment*,
<http://www.cps.ca/caringforkids/whensick/Dehydration&Diarrhea.htm>
6. CHEP. (2009). *Making Homemade Baby Food: A workshop for parents-to-be and parents of new babies*,
<http://www.chep.org/babyfood.htm>.
7. Day, N., Young, N. (2005). *Blender Baby Food*.
8. Dietitians of Canada. (1998). *Why is breastfeeding considered best?*,
[http://www.dietitians.ca/resources/resourcesearch.asp?fn=view&contentid=1326&resource_resourcectype=e=FAQ\(Frequently%20asked%20question\)%20&resource_language=English](http://www.dietitians.ca/resources/resourcesearch.asp?fn=view&contentid=1326&resource_resourcectype=e=FAQ(Frequently%20asked%20question)%20&resource_language=English)
9. Elynn Satter Associates. (2009). *Birth to 3 Months: Feeding Your Newborn*,
<https://ellynsatter.com/showArticle.jsp?id=256§ion=277>
10. Government of Manitoba. (2006). *Feeding Baby Solid Foods*,
<http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthyliving/nutrition/pubs/solidfoods.pdf>
11. Healthy Alberta. (2007). *Feeding Your Baby or Toddler*,
<http://www.healthyalberta.com/HealthyEating/529.htm>
12. Kalnins, D., Saab, J. (2002). *Better Food for Kids*, see attached.
13. Mayo Clinic. (2009). *Iron deficiency anemia*,
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/iron-deficiency-anemia/DS00323>

14. Medline Plus. (2009). *Dehydration*,

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000982.htm>

15. Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region's Nutrition Newsletter. (2008). *Feeding Baby...Introducing Solids*, see attached.

16. Winnipeg Health. (2007). *Feeding Your Baby Solid Foods*, DVD.