

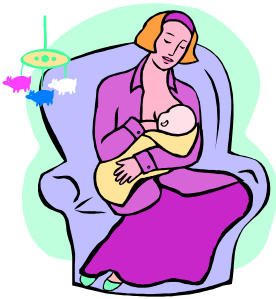
New Recommendations for Starting Solids

New Recommendations

Recently, there have been changes to the age of introduction of solids for infants. It is now recommended that healthy, full term infants are exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life because breast milk is the best food for your baby. Health professionals used to recommend that infants could start solids between four and six months of age.

These new recommendations mean that most babies who are healthy and born at term can wait until six months to start solids. The same recommendations apply to infants who are fed commercial breast milk substitutes (infant formula).

What is Exclusive Breastfeeding?



Exclusive breastfeeding does however allow for undiluted vitamin and mineral supplements and medicines.

Exclusive breastfeeding is defined as the practice of feeding only breast milk and excludes water, commercial breast milk substitutes, and other liquids and solid foods.

Why the New Recommendations?

Health Canada looked at the scientific literature and found that there was enough evidence to support exclusive breastfeeding for six months. Exclusive breastfeeding for six months provided additional protection against gastrointestinal infections.

It was previously thought that infant iron stores only lasted until four months of age. However, current evidence suggests that for most healthy infants born at term to mothers who are well nourished there is no difference in iron status between infants who are breastfed to six months versus four months.

Don't Start Too Soon

If you are breastfeeding, introducing solid foods before six months of age may decrease the amount of breast milk you produce and interfere with the absorption of important nutrients.

If you wait until your baby is ready for solid foods they will be better able to digest them and have the skills needed for eating. This will help ensure your baby will be more interested in trying new foods and will in turn increase their success at eating.

Signs Your Baby Is Ready for Solids

Each child should be treated as an individual when it comes to starting solids as all babies develop at different rates. When your baby is approaching six months of age, you can start to look for signs that your baby is ready to start solids. In healthy, full term infants, the signs of readiness for solid foods include:

- Infant can hold his head up without support
- Infant can sit alone or with little support
- Infant opens her mouth when food is offered on a spoon
- Infant turns her head away if she does not want to eat

- Infant can move semi-solid food to back of mouth and swallow it without squeezing it back out
- Breastfed infant is hungry even after breastfeeding 10 times in 24 hours.

When trying a new food, keep in mind that gagging is not the same as choking. Gagging is normal and actually protects your baby from choking.

Growth spurts are common at about three weeks and three months of age. During a growth spurt, your baby may need to be breastfed more often or need extra commercial breast milk substitute at these times. This is not a sign that your baby needs solid foods. Introducing solid foods does not help your baby sleep through the night.

If you are unsure if your baby is ready for solid foods, check with your health professional.

Let Your Baby Take the Lead

When your baby is ready to start eating solid foods, it is important to let your baby decide how much he/she wants to eat. When starting solids, continue to breastfeed as breast milk (or breast milk substitutes) remains the most important food for your baby. As your baby gets older and eats more solid foods, his/her intake of breast milk or breast milk substitute will gradually decrease. Continue to breastfeed or formula feed on cue. Common cues include sucking, smacking lips, searching for an open mouth, putting a fist in the mouth or crying.

First Foods

After six months (26 weeks) of age, breast milk alone may not meet all of the infant's nutrient needs, specifically, iron, zinc and vitamin A. Solids must be started at this time.



At six months of age, introduce infants to nutrient-rich solid foods with particular attention to iron. Iron fortified infant rice cereal (pablum) is the recommended first food as it is high in iron, is easy to digest and is one of the least allergenic of first foods.

To meet energy and nutrient needs, babies should be gradually introduced to a variety of nutrient-rich solid foods between six to twelve months of life with continued breastfeeding for up to two years and beyond.

For information on the order of introduction of appropriate and safe solid foods, contact your local public health unit.

Provincial Nutrition Newsletter References

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