

Source: Yaron, Ruth. 1994 *Super Baby Foods*. Ardenwald, PA: F.J. Roberts Publishing.

# 1. BEGINNING SOLID FOODS

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The term "solid foods" refers to food (baby cereals, fruits, vegetables, meats, and mixed foods) especially prepared for a baby, usually by cooking and puréeing or straining. "Baby food" includes solid foods and baby juices. Breast milk and commercial infant formula, although the major part of a baby's diet, do not come under either the category baby food or solid foods.

## When Should I Start Feeding My Baby Solid Foods?

The answer is: when your pediatrician tells you that it's OK to start solid foods. She will probably agree with the American Academy of Pediatrics, whose guidelines state that the best time to begin feeding your baby solid foods is between 4 and 6 months of age. And the closer to 6 months the better, especially if you are breastfeeding. Your baby's body in its first few months was designed to digest breast milk, or something similar to it. And, calorie for calorie, no solid food has the nutritional quality of breast milk or formula for your young baby. If you feed your baby solid foods too early, her milk intake may decrease. You'd be replacing milk, the best food for your baby, with foods that are nutritionally inferior and not as digestible. Solid foods should not *replace* breast milk, they should *supplement* it.

### Why You Should Wait Until At Least 4 Months

Your baby is not physically ready to eat solid foods until he is around 4 months old. Although your mother or grandmother will strongly disagree, saying that she gave her babies solids when they were only 2 weeks old, there are several reasons to wait at least 4 months before starting your baby on solid foods.

**Reason 1.** Your baby's digestive system is too immature for solid foods before 4 months. Although he can suck very well, he does not have a lot of saliva to help digest food. Until he is at least 3-4 months old, his system lacks certain digestive enzymes, such as an enzyme called *amylase*, needed for digesting cereals (starches or complex carbohydrates). His body has trouble digesting some fats before he is 6 months old. Some foods will pass through him undigested and end up in his diaper;

## Which Food Should Be First?

The first foods you should feed your baby are those that are easily digested and least likely to trigger an allergic reaction. Opinions vary, but the most often recommended first food is commercial iron-enriched baby rice cereal. Other popular first foods are avocado, sweet potato, ripe banana, and if your baby is older, millet cereal and yogurt. You and your pediatrician should decide which food should be given to your baby at her very first meal.

### Commercial Rice Cereal

Commercial iron-fortified baby rice cereal is the first choice of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Rice is very easily digested, is rarely an allergen, and thins readily when added to liquid. Most commercial cereals are refined and processed. Earth's Best is not—it is made from whole brown rice and is organic. If you wish to use commercial baby cereal, I highly recommend Earth's Best. Find it at some supermarkets, all natural foods stores, or order from some baby product catalogs or from mail order natural foods companies (page 142). Store opened boxes of cereal in a cool, dry place for up to one month. After one month, the cereal's nutrient content begins to decrease.

### Homemade Whole Grain Cereals

If your baby is at least 6 months old, I recommend homemade whole grain brown rice or millet cereal as baby's first food. These cereals are easily digested, but your baby must be at least 6 months old before he has the necessary digestive enzymes to handle the complex carbohydrates in these cereals. Instructions on how to prepare and store homemade whole grain cereals (Super Porridge) begin on page 207 in Part II. Although homemade cereals do contain iron, most experts agree that the iron amounts are not enough for a growing baby. It is important that you read about iron beginning on page 69.

### Banana

Mashed ripe banana is an excellent first food for baby. As discussed on page 427, bananas are nutritious and very easy for your baby to digest. Many other cultures use banana exclusively as their first baby food. However, some experts caution that the sweet taste of bananas may give your baby a "sweet tooth" and cause him to refuse less sweet tasting foods later. I personally wouldn't be concerned about that. My baby started on bananas and he now happily eats brewer's yeast! If you've ever tasted brewer's yeast you know what I mean.

**WARNING:** Some experts recommend against feeding a young baby bananas because of the fungicides with which they (and all other imported fruits) are sprayed. Banana skins are porous, allowing the fungicides to be absorbed into the flesh. Try to buy only certified organically-grown bananas.

### **Avocado**

Mashed ripe avocado is also an excellent first food for baby. They are so nutritious that some claim humans can live on them exclusively. Avocados are also an excellent source of the unsaturated fatty acids that your baby needs for brain development. See page 426 for more information on avocados.

### **Cooked Sweet Potato**

Cooked mashed sweet potato is another favorite first food. It is highly nutritious and rich in beta-carotene (vitamin A). This is a great first food for your 4-month old baby, if you don't wish to start her out on sweet bananas or a processed baby cereal. Sweet potatoes are discussed in detail on page 461.

### **Yogurt**

Yogurt is a good first food for babies who are at least 6 months old. Yogurt is a Super Baby Food which contains beneficial bacteria that promote intestinal health. It is similar-tasting to milk, which is a benefit to a beginning eater who is familiar only with breast milk or formula. Whole milk yogurt, instead of low-fat yogurt, is recommended because your baby needs fats. Baby yogurt should be of the plain variety. Don't buy the yogurt with sugary fruit added or, worse yet, the yogurt that contains artificial sweetener (Nutrasweet®, saccharin®). There is more information on yogurt, including how to save lots of money by making your own (it's easy!), beginning on page 252.

Although yogurt made from cow's milk may be given to a baby younger than one year old, cow's milk should not be fed to babies *in place of* breast milk or formula before age one year (page 60).

**NOTE:** If allergies to milk run in your family, you shouldn't feed your baby yogurt made from cow's milk. Babies with milk allergy can have yogurt made from other milks—see page 129. Talk to your pediatrician. Milk allergy and lactose intolerance are discussed in more detail on page 33.

in fact, stool analyses of babies under three months of age who have eaten solid foods show undigested food particles. And some high protein foods, like eggs, meat, and even cow's milk, given too early may cause problems with your baby's immature kidneys.

**Reason 2.** Your baby is not developmentally ready to eat solid foods. His throat muscles are not developed enough to swallow solid foods until he is at least 4 months old. And, it is not until about 4 months that he is able to use his tongue to transfer food from the front to the back of his mouth. In fact, when you touch his tongue, he reacts by pushing his tongue outward or forward. This response, called the *extrusion reflex* or the *tongue-thrust reflex*, is an inborn mechanism designed to protect your baby from choking on foreign substances that he cannot yet properly swallow. This reflex will not disappear until he is around 16-18 weeks old. The first time you feed him with a spoon, it may seem that he is spitting out the food and closing his mouth at the wrong time. But his tongue movement is simply the result of the not-yet-unlearned extrusion reflex and not because he doesn't want the food. It is not until he is about 5 months old that he will see the spoon coming and open his mouth in anticipation.

**Reason 3.** Your baby must have a way of telling you that he is satiated. He lets you know that he is finished breast or bottle feeding by stopping his sucking or by falling asleep. But until he becomes able to turn his head to refuse food, which occurs at around 4 or 5 months, he has no way of letting you know he has had enough solid food. Because of this inability, when you feed solid foods to a too-young baby, you may be unintentionally force feeding him. This practice can interfere with his body's self-regulating eating mechanism and lead to overweight later in life. As with adults, your baby should eat only when he is hungry.

**Reason 4.** Beginning solid foods too early has been associated with other problems later in life, such as obesity, respiratory problems like bronchial asthma, and food allergies. For more information on how food allergies are caused by too-early introduction of solid foods, see page 30.

**Reason 5.** Solid foods will not make your baby sleep through the night. Studies show that 1/4 of all babies sleep through the night at 3 months of age, whether or not they are eating solid foods. Even if solid foods will help your baby sleep longer, that is still not a good reason to begin solid foods early. I know sleep deprivation is torture—most of us have been there. Hang in there. One night he'll sleep right through, and then you can start feeling normal again.

**Reason 6.** If you are breastfeeding and give your baby solid foods too early, your milk production may be decreased.

### **Don't Wait Longer than 8 Months**

After six months, your baby begins to need solid foods for some nutrients, such as iron, vitamin C, protein, carbohydrates, zinc, water, and calories, and delaying food may cause delayed growth. Besides playing a nutritional role, solid foods help your baby developmentally, as discussed under the section *Do Not Use an Infant Feeder* on page 21. It is important that your baby start developing eating and chewing skills