

Feeding Our Youngest

5 Months

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It's an exciting time for your baby and you! As your baby grows and develops, his feeding skills are developing, too. He is very skilled with breastfeeding or bottle feeding at this point but is probably showing increasing interest in your meals and the food you eat. Change will be the key for the next few months, as your baby learns about food and begins building lifelong healthy eating skills. Here is what you can expect as you support your baby through the changes to come.

Expect change, not routine

By waiting to start solid foods until your baby is ready, the progression to table food by age 10 months or so should be fairly smooth and ever-changing. You will find that your baby works hard to master these new skills — and, with your help, will advance with confidence. So, let's talk about next steps!

What do we need to get started?

A small, bowlled (rounded part) spoon with a long handle will help you steer small amounts of food toward your baby's mouth — and he will do his part to see the spoon, open his mouth, close his lips around the food, swallow the bite, and get ready for more.

Why is iron-fortified infant cereal, introduced at age 6 months, a good first solid food?

Infant cereal can be mixed with breast milk or formula, giving it a familiar flavor. You will make it thin and smooth to begin with so that it's easy for baby to swallow. As baby gets used to this solid food, you will gradually increase the thick-



ness and lumpiness of the cereal to help baby learn to accept new textures.

Another reason to offer infant cereals is that they are iron-fortified. Iron is essential to your baby's growth and development. Babies are born with iron stored in their bodies, and both breast milk and most formulas are good sources of iron. But your baby is growing rapidly, so these iron stores are used up by age 6 months or so. At this age, babies need extra iron from solid food sources to prevent anemia.

Building blocks: Iron

Who's at Risk for Iron-deficiency Anemia (or Low Iron)?



- Premature babies born more than 3 weeks early
- Breastfed babies not given iron rich foods after 6 months

- Babies who drink formula that is not iron fortified
- Babies who drink cow's or goat's milk before age 12 months

Having low iron levels may affect your baby's:

- Learning ability
- Social, emotional health
- Mental development
- Scores on motor skills tests

What about baby led weaning?

Baby Led Weaning is a recent trend in infant feeding that allows babies to self-feed finger foods when solids are first offered. This practice skips over some important skill building each baby needs for proper swallowing and oral development. We encourage following your baby's abilities and starting with pureed and mashed foods that are easy to swallow. We will talk more about advancing the texture of your baby's diet in later months.

For more information about Baby Led Weaning, see

<https://www.elynsatterinstitute.org/family-meals-focus/78-baby-led-weaning/>

Steps to introducing solids

Your baby is almost ready, and you are, too! Here's what you will need to know:

- Offer single ingredient foods to be sure baby tolerates each new food well.
- Feed solid foods from a spoon, not a bottle.
- Slowly increase the thickness of the cereal, to help your baby build chewing skills.
- Start with one solid food feeding a day, and increase to two, for a daily total of 1/3 to 1/2 cup.
- Be ready to advance baby's diet as she develops.

What about water?

Babies who are only breastfeeding or bottle feeding don't need extra water, as breast milk and formula provide all the fluid a baby needs. As solid foods are introduced, you can offer a small amount of water from a cup.

See next month for more about introducing your baby to a cup and increasing the variety of foods you offer.

Enjoy baby's enthusiasm while feeding your youngest!

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