

When to feed Baby Solids

Many parents have questions about when to first feed their baby solids. Some questions asked are, “Can I feed my child solids at four months or would it be okay to start them even earlier? Why should I wait to feed them solids until six months?” With all these questions, a lot of anxiety and insecurities can be created.

Health Canada suggests that is best to start solids at six months; doing so sooner may affect a baby’s intestinal development. Your baby’s intestines need to be mature enough to handle new things. The intestines are the body’s filtering system, screening out potentially harmful substances and letting in healthy nutrients. In early months, this filtering system is immature. Between 5-7 months a baby’s intestinal lining goes through a developmental growth spurt and becomes more selective of what it lets through to prevent potentially allergenic foods from entering the bloodstream. A baby’s swallowing mechanism is also immature; another reason not to rush solids as the tongue and swallowing mechanisms may not be ready to work together for solids.

Many parents think their child is ready to eat solids because they are showing signs of “wanting to eat.” They may be watching you or her opening their mouth when they see you lifting up the spoon but that doesn’t necessarily mean they are ready for food. It may simply mean she is interested and learning as she gets closer to the age when her body is ready for solids.

When starting solids around the 6 month mark, it is important to remember to include iron fortified foods. Your baby needs iron for healthy blood and for developing brain cells. Without enough iron, babies become tired and irritable and are more prone to infection.. Your baby is born with a natural supply of iron, which begins to deplete at around 6 months, making this the perfect time to begin solids. Iron enriched cereals are an ideal first food. As your baby grows, make sure that you include iron rich foods every day.

The feeding relationship with your child should be one that is enjoyed both by your child and you. It can be a time of bonding, as well as teaching your child the important values of family time and nutrition. As you are beginning to feed your baby solids, it is important to keep in mind that your child is not used to foods and may not enjoy some of the foods he tries. Keep trying; a baby may have to try a food several different times before he or she decides it's good to eat. Be consistent and enjoy this fun exciting new time of exposing your baby to a world of different food choices.

You can find lots more information on healthy eating on the Alberta Health and Wellness website, www.healthyalberta.com where a booklet is available called "Feeding Baby Solid Foods from 6-12 months"

By Erin Visser. Erin is a Healthy Families Home Visitor at Family Services of Central Alberta, your Parent Link Centre. For information about parenting, call 403-343-6400 or go to www.fsca.ca