



Kapa'a Pediatrics, LLC

## Starting Solid Food

### **Infant Feeding Guidelines:**

There are many different ways to start solid foods for your infant. If you look around the world at different cultures there is a large variation of when and what to feed your infant. The following recommendations are based off of our experience as pediatricians, raising three children, scientific studies, and logic. The goal is to maximize infant health through nutrition while making meal preparation simple and realistic for the average family.

### **When to start feeding solids?**

Although babies develop at different rates, the majority (95%) of infants are developmentally ready to eat around 5-6 months of age. The following questions can help you determine if your baby is ready to eat.

- 1) Do they enjoy chewing on teething toys?
- 2) Do they grab objects in front of them and put them in their mouth?
- 3) With supporting their waist, can they sit up and look around with good head control?
- 4) Do they stare at you while you're eating and look like they want a bite?

If the answer is yes to these questions then it is likely that you are ready to start feeding solid food. If your infant is 7 months old and you do not think they are developmentally ready please call us to discuss this further. We do not recommend delaying starting solid food if there is not a medical reason. Infants, especially breastfed infants, need additional nutritional supplementation starting at 6 months of age, specifically iron, to maximize their neurologic development. Eating solid foods and chewing on teething food and toys may also help their social development, coordination, and strengthen teeth.

### **What texture and what types of solid foods are appropriate?**

To keep it simple, we have one rule, you may start any soft food that is not processed. In general, processed means anything out of a box, package, jar or neat convenient pouch that sits on a grocery store shelf unrefrigerated. The underlying goal is to get parents and children eating healthy food. If parents are eating three healthy non-processed meals a day, they will not have to spend time or money buying additional food that is made and marketed specifically

for infants. It also avoids all the food dyes and chemicals that are used to process or sterilize food. A special baby blender is not necessary. Crushing with a fork, spoon, or fingers are usually sufficient, otherwise fine-to-coarse chopping with a knife is also acceptable.

It does not matter which food group (vegetables, fruits, meat, starch) you start with as long as it is not processed. Using this method, you will not have to wait any specific amount of time between starting new foods, as allergies from non-processed food are extremely rare.

Examples:

- Vegetables: any fresh vegetable cooked or raw can be mashed or finely chopped
- Fruit: any fresh fruit that can be steamed until soft or finely chopped
- Meat: cooked fish, raw fish (sashimi) with no added sauce, chicken, pork, steak, including the fat as long as it soft and not stringy
- Starch: rice, poi/taro, yam, potato, sweet potato, bread fruit, nuts, grains

### **How Much:**

Believe it or not, they will tell you when they are full. Rarely have we seen any infant not be able to control the volume of solids they eat. One to two meals per day is reasonable for the first month after starting solids. Thereafter, infants will eat 3-5 meals per day, some meals may simply be a few pieces of fruit. In general, the larger meals will coincide with breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

### **Advancing Solids:**

Most parents do not advance from pureed to harder solids fast enough. When pureed baby food is the main food that is given with no advancement in texture it can lead to problematic eating habits. After a month of feeding softer mashed or finely chopped foods, the texture and size of food pieces should be increased to coarsely chopped. By 9 months of age your infant should mostly be eating soft and firm chunks. By 12 months of age your infant should be eating almost exactly what you are eating just smaller chunks.

It is EXTREMELY RARE for an infant, who is being supervised while eating to aspirate, where the food goes down the windpipe (trachea) and cause a medical emergency or death. The unfortunate, more common, down the windpipe choking episode occurs in the 2-4 year old running around at a birthday party eating a hotdog. It is much more common for infants to gag when food gets stuck in the back of the throat which stimulates their gag reflex. Lean them forward and pat their upper back with a few firm pats. After gagging for a few seconds, sometimes the infant will actually throw up to clear the obstruction in the back of the throat. As long as the chunks of food are not bigger than a peanut size, the chance of getting lodged in the throat is almost zero.

### **Final Thoughts:**

- The more exposure to different kinds of real (non-processed) foods from 6-12 months of age helps to decrease risk of food allergy. This is true for peanuts and eggs, especially if there is a family history of food allergy. Thus, if you don't regularly cook with nuts you should use a small amount of peanut butter (the one exception to our processed food rule) towards 6 months of age.
- Water can be started around 6-9 months of age. A regular cup will do and they will practice for a year before getting good at drinking water. They will not drink that much water and if you stick to the non-processed diet as noted above, most of the food will have a high water content.
- Dairy (cow's milk, cheese, and yogurt) is not a "real" food group and should not be fed to human infants, although cheese and yogurt are usually fermented and tolerated well. Cow's milk can be very constipating and so if you choose to give your child cow's milk monitor their bowel movements closely.
- Sauces added for cooking are generally considered "processed" so try to remove a portion to feed your infant before adding sauces.
- Peas, black or kidney beans, and blueberries are great finger foods that do not need to be prepared and are just as convenient as cereal, crackers, and other commonly used processed finger foods.
- Large ribs/bones (beef, pork, turkey) with most of the meat removed, a large piece of carrot, or large piece of steak are a few of Dr. Lam's personal favorite infant teething items. Use large pieces so they are too big to choke on. They are also great for coordination and to keep infants occupied while eating dinner.
- Water should be the only liquid that you feed your infant in addition to breastmilk or formula. Juice, even if fresh squeezed, is not a substitute for water, and should not be given to infants.
- Honey, should not be given until 1 year of age, not that there is anything magical about 1 year of age, but there can be a toxin associated with honey that can cause problems in infants. Also, there is no good health reason why you have to give your infant honey.