



Transitioning to Solid Foods

The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend starting babies on solids at approximately six months of age. Despite the recommendation, studies have shown that the majority of Australian babies will start consuming solids between 4 and 7 months of age. Every child is an individual and some babies may be showing physical signs that they can be weaned safely from 4 months. The table below identifies the types of behaviour associated with readiness to wean a child.

When is my child ready to wean and progress through the stages?			
Time	Stage 1 4-6 months	Stage 2 7-9 months	Stage 3 9-12 months
	Demanding more feeds	Picking up objects between thumb and forefinger	Drinking from a cup unsupervised
	Not lasting more than 3-4 hours between feeds	Showing interest in what the family are eating	Ability to place items in a container and take them out again
	Waking in the night when previously they have slept through	Showing signs of beginning to chew objects	Ability to hold their objects between thumb and forefinger
	The ability to hold their head up straight without support	Attempting to feed themselves	

The Guidelines recommend that first solids are an iron-fortified cereal and/or an iron-rich food such as pureed meat, tofu or legumes. Then, different types of pureed vegetables, fruit and other foods can be added, varying the texture from pureed to soft, then mashed, then minced as the baby gets older.

Introducing iron-rich foods early in the time when solids are introduced to a baby is essential. Pureed meat is one of the most straightforward methods of introducing iron-rich food early in children's transition to solids. As iron is an essential nutrient for children's neurocognitive development, for families that follow a plant-based diet, getting enough iron into their children's diet for optimal neurocognitive development can be challenging. Families who want their child to be brought up on a plant-based diet need to keep a careful watch on their child's consumption of iron and zinc-rich foods. For vegan mothers, it is important to continue breastfeeding for as long as possible – the Guidelines note that at least until the child is two is desirable – and to consult a dietician for specialised advice regarding iron and B12 supplementation.

By following the baby's cues to learn how much food they want at any meal and persisting with introducing new foods to the baby's diet, there will reach a point, by around the age of 12 months, where they are eating the same foods that the rest of the family enjoys. Sharing mealtimes with the child – and as new foods are introduced to the baby's diet, sharing the same foods – is key to developing the baby's sense of mealtimes as pleasant and shared time.

Commercial Baby food

There is a plethora of options available when it comes to starting a baby on solids and introducing new flavours to their palate. Commercially prepared baby food is one of those options.

Nearly all families will turn to commercially prepared baby foods on occasion, but it's important to advise families to minimise their use in favour of homemade product. While commercially prepared are much better at minimising use of salt and sugar than they once were, making baby's food at home lets parents keep salt and sugar out of the food completely, which is an important part of letting babies develop a palate that enjoys natural flavours.

Further Recommendation

- Avoid whole nuts and other hard foods to reduce the risk of choking.
- Do not add sugar or honey to infant foods as this increases the risk of dental caries.
- Avoid juices and sugar sweetened drinks. Limit intake of all foods with added sugars.
- Do not add salt to foods for infants. This is an important safety issue as infant kidneys are immature and unable to excrete excess salt.
- Consumption of nutrient-poor discretionary foods with high levels of saturated fat, added sugars, and/or added salt (e.g. cakes, biscuits and potato chips) should be avoided.

References:

- Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia (National Health & Medical Research Council, 2003)
- Infant Feeding Guidelines for Health Workers (National Health & Medical Research Council, 2003)
- Infant Feeding Guidelines Summary (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013)
- Feeding and nutrition of Infants and Young Children (World Health Organisation, 2000)
- Child and Youth Health www.cyh.com.au
- Australian Breast Feeding Association Guidelines.