FEEDING SOLID FOOD

*The information in this handout is from USDA Food and Nutrition Service FNS-258.

When a baby is developmentally ready to accept them, solid foods must be served to make a reimbursable meal in the Child Nutrition Programs. Young babies, under 6 months of age, do not follow rigid schedules and may need to eat every 1 ½ to 3 hours.

Babies should be fed when they are hungry and not restricted to a rigid schedule. Meals in the Infant Meal Pattern are specified as a guideline only. It is important to avoid feeding solid foods before a baby is developmentally ready for them and before the parent, in consultation with the baby’s doctor, has indicated to begin serving them. A caregiver can be reimbursed for a meal offered to a baby as long as he/she offers the baby minimum serving size of the required meal components in the meal. The food offered does not have to be totally consumed by the baby for the meal to be reimbursable. Also, a meal is reimbursable as long as the required meal components in the respective meal are offered to the baby during the course of the day while the baby is in child care. Thus, for example, if a baby is not hungry for a meal component required at lunch, it can be offered as a snack when the baby is hungry. Babies younger than 4 months of age should not be fed solid foods unless the baby’s doctor authorizes them.

- Introduce solids to a baby that have been previously introduced, with no problems, by the baby’s parents.
- Introduce new foods one at a time.
- Introduce new foods gradually; for example, wait at least a week (7 days) between each new food.
- Introduce a small amount (e.g., about 1 to 2 teaspoons) of a new food at first (this allows a baby to adapt to a food’s flavor and texture).
- Use single-ingredient foods at first to easily see how the baby reacts to each new food. Caregivers who are preparing foods at home for a baby and older children should separate the baby’s portion before adding other ingredients and;
- Observe the baby closely for reactions after feeding a new food. If there is a reaction, stop feeding the food and discuss this with the parents. Consult the parents, who should contact their baby’s doctor, before introducing that food in the future.
Feeding Solid Foods Too Early

Feeding solid foods too early may increase the risk that babies will:

- Choke on the food.
- Develop food allergies or intolerances, or;
- Consume less breast milk or formula and not get enough calories and other nutrients for proper growth and development.

Feeding solid foods before babies are ready will not help them sleep through the night or make them eat fewer times in a day.

Feeding Solid Foods Too Late

Delaying the introduction of solid foods beyond the time when a baby is developmentally ready for them increases the risk that babies will:

- Not learn to eat solid foods properly.
- Become malnourished.
- Develop iron-deficiency anemia, and;
- Not grow normally.

Most babies are ready to eat solid foods between 4 to 6 months of age.

Type of cereal to Feed

Iron-fortified infant cereal is a good first solid food because it is easy to digest, and:

- Is least likely to cause allergic reaction.
- Contains important nutrients, and;
- Can be altered in consistency to meet a baby’s development needs.

Vegetables and fruits may be introduced when the baby readily accepts 2 to 3 tablespoons of infant cereal at each meal. Babies often start on vegetables and fruits around 6 months of age.

Commercially or home-prepared vegetables or fruits can be fed to babies.

- Commercially prepared baby food such as: beans, peas, squash, sweet potatoes, carrots, beets, spinach, applesauce, apricots, bananas, peaches, pears and plums are okay.
The following commercially prepared baby foods are not reimbursable in the Infant Meal Pattern (but can be served as additional foods):

- Jarred cereals, desserts, or puddings that list a fruit as the first ingredient in their ingredient listing.

Make sure to carefully read the ingredient listing of commercially prepared baby food fruits and vegetables. Plain commercial baby vegetables and fruits generally:

- Contain more nutrients ounce for ounce.
- Do not usually contain concentrated sweeteners (e.g., sugar) or salt, and;
- May contain fewer ingredients that could possibly cause an allergic reaction.

Meat and meat alternatives include meat, poultry, fin fish (not shell fish), cheese, cooked dry beans and peas and eggs (yolks only).

Peanut butter, other nut or seed butters, nuts and seeds should not be fed to babies and are not reimbursable as meal components in the Infant Meal Pattern. These foods cause choking and may cause an allergic reaction in some babies.

**Avoid feeding babies these foods (they are higher in fat, lower in protein):** hot dogs, sausage, bacon, luncheon meats.

These foods are not reimbursable as meat/meat alternatives in the Infant Meal Pattern:

- Commercial fish sticks, other commercial breaded fish products, canned fish with bones, hot dogs, and sausage, “Baby Food” meat sticks. Infants may choke on these foods.
- Commercially prepared baby food combination dinners. These dinners generally have less nutritional value by weight than single-ingredient meats and vegetables.

If a parent requests, these dinners can be served as additional foods within a reimbursable meal. The parent can provide the dinner if they desire to do so.

Cheese may be introduced to infants 8 months or older. Small thin slices or strips of cheese are easier and safer. Do not feed chunks of cheese, which can cause choking. If serving cheese, regular cheese (such as natural cheddar, Colby, or mozzarella) and cottage cheese are the best choices.

- Cheese food, cheese spread and pasteurized process cheese are generally higher in salt than regular cheeses or cottage cheese.

Any cooked dry beans and dry peas, such as kidney beans, lima beans, pinto beans, or chick peas, may be served to babies 8 months or older. Serve small quantities (1 to 2 teaspoons) of mashed or pureed cooked beans or peas at first.
**Bread and Crackers**

Bread or crackers may be served at the snack or with meals throughout the course of the day. Consult with each baby’s parent about bread and crackers being introduced at home so that you can serve the same food at the same time. At 8 or 9 months of age, babies enjoy having finger foods so they can practice picking up the foods. Also, at that age a baby’s risk of having a reaction to wheat decreases. Examples of foods to serve babies include:

- Strips or small pieces of dry bread or toast or crackers
- Plain crackers preferably low in salt such as low salt soda crackers
- Small pieces of soft tortilla or soft pita bread
- Teething biscuits

Check the food label to make sure the crackers or bread is made from whole grain or enriched meal or flour.

The types of bread and crackers that are reimbursable on the Infant Meal Pattern include:

- Breads (white, wheat, whole wheat, French, Italian and similar breads, all without nuts, seeds or whole grain kernels)
- Biscuits
- Bagels (made without nuts, seeds, or hard pieces of whole grain kernels)
- English muffins
- Pita bread (white, wheat, whole wheat)
- Rolls (white, wheat, whole wheat, potato)
- Soft tortillas (wheat or corn)
- Crackers – saltines, low salt crackers, or snack crackers made without nuts, seeds or hard pieces of whole grain kernels
- Graham crackers made without honey

**Avoid**

Do not feed babies these foods, which present a choking risk:

- Snack potato or corn chips, pretzels, or cheese twists.
- Cookies or granola.
- Crackers or breads with seeds, nut pieces, or whole grain kernels such as wheat berries, and;
- Whole kernels of cooked rice, barley, or wheat; these should be finely ground or mashed before feeding to babies.

---

**Feeding Infants “A Guide for Use in the Child Nutrition Programs” USDA Food Nutrition Service FNS -258.**

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.