

## Starting Foods - An Overview



Chad P. Nevola, M.D., Inc.

Starting foods should be an enjoyable and exciting experience for both parents and children. The major concern when beginning a new food is an allergic reaction or intolerance to a particular food. For this reason, every new food should have a separate trial period. The more common reactions to foods include vomiting, diarrhea, and/or a rash covering the child's body shortly after eating the food in question, with each exposure to that food.

Predominantly for the above reasons:

#1 - **Introduce a maximum of one new food every 3-4 days**. This rule applies to different foods of the same type as well, e.g. rice cereal v. oat or barley cereal. It is recommended that this guideline should be adhered to consistently until a year of age.

#2 - Cereal should be given separate from any bottles and before bottles twice a day. Breakfast and dinner time would be conventional, but the schedule can be tailored to a family's needs. Unless specified by your doctor, **never mix cereal with formula in a bottle**.

#3 - If we are starting with cereal, mix the cereal on a spoon with formula, breast milk, or water, to create a runny consistency. Prior to this, children recognize formula or breast milk as food - and they are very thin in consistency compared to the foods you will be introducing. They may not recognize something of thick consistency as food and may reject it initially. Gradually thickening the cereal over time is a nice way to accommodate a child to what is likely his/her first baby food.

#4 - Begin by introducing any of the Stage 1 foods thereafter, remembering the rule of **one new food every 3-4 days**. It is now generally recommended that parents begin introducing vegetables before fruits. The reasoning behind this stems from the lower sugar content of vegetables, and the idea that if a child begins with sweet fruits he/she is less likely to accept vegetables when they are introduced. Any food that is currently on its 3-4 day trial should be given separately from any other food given at a meal and not mixed.

The following is a typical feeding schedule for infants who have been fully introduced to baby foods. Once a particular food is considered "safe" - meaning that it has been tried for 3-4 days and the child has exhibited no reaction - it may be regularly inserted into this schedule, and may be mixed with other "safe" foods as desired.

BREAKFAST	LUNCH	DINNER
Fruit (to a max of 2 oz. = Approx. ½ jar)	Fruit/Vegetable	Fruit/Vegetable
Cereal (to a max of 4 tbsp. = a small bowl)	Nurse/Formula	Cereal
Nurse/Formula		Nurse/Formula

The philosophy behind this schedule is to accommodate the child to three meals/day. During this conversion period, your child may be hungry between meals. Nursing or Formula is generally recommended in this circumstance until such time as he/she gets accommodated to the schedule, which typically takes about 2-4 months. Although the intent is to adhere to the above schedule in the order provided at each meal, it is not unreasonable to adjust the schedule slightly to suit a family's needs.

Lastly, should your child manifest one of the aforementioned reactions consistently in response to a particular food (vomiting, diarrhea, and diffuse body rashes are among the most common type of reactions), stop the food in question and mention this to your doctor at your next scheduled visit. Severe reactions are exceedingly rare, but should the reaction be severe, involving difficulty breathing or swallowing, call 911 and then contact your doctor immediately thereafter.

These are a few basic guidelines to consider once your child is ready for foods. Keeping them in mind, you should be prepared to safely introduce baby foods to your child. Enjoy!

#### **ADDENDUM ON PEANUTS:**

AAP recommendations now support the introduction of peanuts/peanut butter into the diet after Stage 1 fruits/vegetables have been introduced already or according to cultural/parental practice. Smooth peanut butter, thinned with hot water, cooled, and introduced mixed in with other foods is considered a preferred safe method of introduction, using it as "the new food" for 3-4 days. Patients with severe eczema or known egg allergy should see an allergist for skin testing before introducing peanut/peanut butter in the diet.