

Your baby's first solid food

Around the middle of your baby's first year, she should be ready to start solids. This coincides with two events: your baby's decreasing iron stores and her developmental readiness. Before starting solids, be sure to discuss this with your pediatrician.

Rice cereal as a first food

Rice cereal is typically the first complementary food introduced to infants. It's made with gentle ingredients, and its smooth, fine texture is developmentally appropriate for your baby. Usually, oatmeal is the second cereal offered.

Wait about three days in between each cereal to see how your baby tolerates them. Watch for signs of allergy or intolerance such as diarrhea, rash, or vomiting. If any of these occur, stop feeding your baby that variety and contact your pediatrician. Offer Mixed Grain Cereals and Cereals with Fruit only after your baby has mastered rice and oatmeal cereals.

Mix it up

Your baby's first bite of "solids" should look more like thin milk. Mix one tablespoon of cereal with four to five tablespoons of breastmilk or formula until it has a souplike consistency.

It's show time

To start solids, pick a time of day when your baby is in good spirits, wide awake, and mildly hungry. A quiet time is best so you don't need to worry about rushing through a feeding.

- ★ **Get the appropriate spoon.** Use a small baby-size spoon that's coated to protect your baby's tender gums.
- ★ **Protect your baby's clothes.** Cover your baby with a large, washable bib.
- ★ **Take a picture.** Have your camera or video camera ready.
- ★ **Let her explore.** Because your baby will probably try to grab the spoon anyway, place a dab of cereal on her high chair tray so she can "finger paint" with it and become familiar with its texture before you start feeding.
- ★ **Before you start.** Breastfeed your baby or give her a bottle to take the edge off her hunger so she won't be fussy. Don't reduce the time you spend nursing or the ounces of breastmilk or formula you offer. This assures you that your baby still gets adequate nourishment for growth, regardless of how much—and which—solid food she eats.
- ★ **Feed baby her new food!** Give her one to two teaspoons at first in half spoonfuls. Sit facing your baby and hold the spoonful of food about 12 inches from her face. Wait until she's paying attention before putting the spoon up to her mouth. For the first bite try putting a dab of cereal on her lip. If she's agreeable to that first taste, put the next bite into her mouth when she opens it. Feed your baby as slowly or as rapidly as she wants.
- ★ **Try cereal again.** Don't be surprised if your baby's first taste pops right back out onto her tongue. It's a natural reflex. Eventually she'll swallow more than she spits out. If your baby seems unhappy about this experience, give it up for now and try again in a week.
- ★ **Follow with breastmilk or formula.** Once you've offered your baby cereal, breastfeed your baby or offer her a bottle.

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