



# Complementary Feeding: Starting Solids

## What does complementary feeding mean?

**C**omplementary feeding means giving other foods in addition to breastmilk to your baby. The introduction of complementary foods is a time of transition when your baby gradually becomes used to eating family foods. This transition period is from about six months to when your baby reaches two years or older. By this time your baby's breastfeeding may be fully replaced by a wide range of quality family foods. As breastmilk is replaced with other foods, your baby may still want to suckle at your breast for comfort.

## How do I know my baby is ready for solid foods?

Your baby will let you know that he/she is interested in the foods you are preparing for your family. He or she will reach out and want to touch, feel and taste foods you are eating. Start by giving your baby small amounts to let him/her experiment with the feel and taste of other foods; a little mashed potato or a small amount of mashed banana. This can be a fun time of learning for your baby, and your baby needs your attention to let him/her experiment and learn. The important thing is to let your baby decide how much he/she wants to eat and not to start too early.

### ***When starting at six months your baby's:***

- enzyme system and gastrointestinal wall have developed to digest the new foods he/she is getting,
- shoulder and neck muscles are strong enough for head control and the coordination of tongue, lip and swallow,
- oral reflexes have developed to swallow semi-solid and solid foods,
- immune system is ready to handle other foods and to protect against pathogens and allergies.



Photo by Melanie Gillis

## What you need to know about complementary feeding

- Exclusive breastfeeding is all your baby needs for the first six months of life. Breastmilk provides all the nutrition, growth factors, protection against illness, and security that your baby needs for growth, development and health.
- Breastfeeding should be continued for two years or longer.



- Start complementary feeding at six months. When starting solids, breastfeed as often as before — *on cue* — and as long as your baby wants. Breastmilk remains the most important food for your baby.
- At six months your baby's digestive system can handle a diversity of foods. He or she now has the capacity to munch down on food (he/she may have some teeth by now), control her tongue, swallow, and use his/her hands to put food into her mouth.
- This is a fun time of exploration and new learning for your baby. Let your baby explore the tastes, colours, aromas, and textures of new foods.
- Give your baby foods that are rich in energy and nutrients, and prepared to be safe and suitable for your baby.
- Give your baby foods he or she is curious about; he/she is learning about food and this is a good way to respond his/her curiosities. The order of food introduction is not important as long as the foods are good for your baby.
- Gradually increase the amount and the number of times per day you feed your baby solid foods.
- It is important to spoon-feed from a plate or bowl. Do not give baby pureed foods through a bottle.
- When your baby is sick, do not stop feeding. Breastfeed more often and let your baby catch up on solid foods later by feeding more frequently when he or she is feeling better.



Photo by Dan Lim

### **What foods are good for my baby?**

In addition to your breastmilk, after six months of age your baby needs high-energy and high nutrient foods; especially foods that are rich in vitamin A, vitamin C, iron and other important minerals. Your baby is now more physically active and he/she continues to grow rapidly during the second half of her first year.

### **Preparing nutrient-rich foods for your baby**

- Potatoes, noodles, rice and porridge are high in energy. These can be cooked and mashed to make them soft and easy for your baby to swallow.
- To one of these add small amounts of nutrient-dense foods such as finely chopped and well-cooked chicken or other meats; well-cooked fish with the



bones carefully removed; cooked mashed egg yolk; or well-cooked, husked and mashed beans or peas.

- You can also add a cooked vegetable. For example, mashed carrot, spinach, sweet potato, squash, broccoli, pumpkin, avocado or tomato.
- A *small* amount of butter, vegetable oil or margarine (with caution, some margarines contain trans fatty acids) can also be added to your baby's dish to increase the energy density of your baby's foods and provide important fats. Butter also adds some vitamin A and vitamin D.
- Your baby will also enjoy the sweet taste of fruit — after all your breastmilk is very sweet. Try mashed bananas, applesauce, bits of seedless orange, mashed peach, pear or apricot, or mashed berries without skin and seeds. Fruit juices should be limited, as they can quickly fill your baby's stomach reducing his or her appetite for breastmilk and more nutrient dense foods.
- Strips of bread make easy snacks for your baby, but avoid other commercially baked goods as they can be high in trans fatty acids.
- When your baby is about nine months old he or she can try some cottage cheese, yoghurt and soft cheeses. The risk of cow's milk allergy is less likely at this later age.

### ***Foods High in...***

<b>Iron</b>	<b>Vitamin A</b>	<b>Vitamin C</b>	<b>Vitamin D</b>
Liver	Egg yolk	Kiwi	Fish
Beef	Carrots	Orange	Whole milk
Chicken (dark meat)	Sweet Potato	Berries	Liver
Egg Yolk	Pumpkin	Melon	Egg yolk
Lamb	Squash	Tomato	
Pork	Mango	Banana	
Beans, lentils	Spinach	Peach	
Tofu	Butter		
Spinach			



### **Do I need to feed my baby commercial baby foods?**

Some infant feeding brochures and pamphlets may tell you to start with iron-fortified baby cereals. Fortified cereals are a convenience food and an easy way to prepare a semi-solid mixture; however, they do not provide the best possible nutrition. Baby cereals were promoted when solid feeding was recommended to start at the age of four months and when more babies were formula feeding. These cereals are very refined and the iron from these cereal-based products is not readily absorbed. Many of the cereals come with added powdered infant formula or skim milk. You may not want to expose your baby to cow's milk proteins at the age of six months.

Jarred baby foods are also a convenience food. They have a pureed consistency and are diluted with water to create a semi-solid consistency. At six months your baby may prefer the taste and texture of cooked, mashed family foods.

### **Does my baby need vitamin or mineral supplements?**

If your baby is full-term, healthy and exclusively breastfed for the first six months, the iron stores he or she received at birth can last well into the second half of his/her life. The iron from breastmilk is very well absorbed (49 per cent ) because it comes with lactoferrin, lactose and vitamin C in the right amounts. Only 10 per cent of the iron from infant formula and 4 per cent from iron-fortified infant cereals is absorbed. When your baby starts solids, the iron from breastmilk remains an important source and your baby can get additional iron from iron-rich foods such as meats, beans, lentils and egg yolks. Your doctor can do a simple haemoglobin test to see that your baby's iron status is adequate.

In some cases breastfed babies may need extra vitamin D (normally vitamin D is acquired through exposure to sunlight and some from breastmilk). Breastfed babies should be assessed for their need to receive vitamin D supplements. Babies who may need these supplements:

- are not exposed to sunlight
- live in northern latitudes
- have darker skin
- are born to mothers who do not consume vitamin D fortified milk

For light-skinned babies living in lower latitudes, giving the mother a vitamin D supplement during pregnancy and lactation, and exposing the baby to sunlight for short periods several times per week along with sustained breastfeeding helps to maintain a baby's vitamin D status.