

# WEST AFRICAN RESCUE ASSOCIATION

## INTRODUCING SOLID FOODS TO YOUR BABY

Introducing solid food to your baby is a really big milestone. You are taking the first steps to helping your baby develop healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime. For some parents, introducing solid food can be confusing. WARA would like to help you make the transition from milk to solid food. In this article you will find useful information regarding food introduction, food safety and food allergies.

YOU WILL FIND BELOW 16 QUESTIONS ABOUT BABY'S FOOD AND NUTRITION EVERY MOM CAN ASK HERSELF.

1. When to introduce baby's first food?
2. Is my baby ready for solid food?
3. What foods to start with?
4. How to introduce solid food?
5. Do I need any special equipment?
6. Do I still need to give my baby breast milk?
7. How can I know when my baby is full?
8. How many times a day should my baby eat solid food?
9. Could my baby have a food allergy?
10. What foods might my baby be allergic to?
11. What happens if my baby has an allergic reaction to a food?
12. Can food allergy be treated?
13. Which type of foods can be delayed or might be unsafe for my baby?
14. What's food intolerance?
15. How to prevent choking?
16. How and when to introduce finger food to my baby?

### 1. WHEN TO INTRODUCE BABY'S FIRST FOOD?

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months of age. At 6 months, breast milk alone doesn't provide your baby with enough nutrients and iron needed for his/her development, so solid food is required. Waiting until 6 months to introduce solid food into your baby's diet will minimize the risk of developing adverse reactions to food and allergies.

### 2. IS MY BABY READY FOR SOLID FOOD?

Between 4 to 6 months, most babies are developmentally ready to start solid foods. At this point, their digestive system is ready to handle solids. In addition, they lose the extrusion reflex that is beneficial for sucking a breast

or a bottle and they will learn how to swallow solid food by developing the coordination of moving the food from the front of the mouth to the back.

Many signs can also indicate that your baby is ready to start solid food:

- Your baby can sit up with support.
- Your baby can keep his/her head in a steady upright position.
- Your baby's birth weight has doubled.
- Your baby is interested in what you are eating and may even try to grab the food from your plate.
- Your baby shows signs of hunger even with 7 to 10 feedings of milk per day.

### **3. WHAT FOODS TO START WITH?**

The food you offer your baby first can vary from culture to culture and family to family. Parents feed their babies a wide range of first foods. Many start with the iron-rich foods like cereals; others choose to introduce veggies and fruits first.

**Cereals:** Rice, wheat, oats.

**Vegetables:** Sweet potatoes, green beans, spinach, green peas, carrots, zucchini, beetroot, squash.

**Fruits:** Apple, banana, pear, avocado, peach.

### **4. HOW TO INTRODUCE SOLID FOOD?**

Choose a day when your baby looks relaxed and happy. First nurse or bottle-feed your baby. Then give him/her one or two teaspoons of pureed solid food. Start with just a small amount of food on the tip of the spoon.

Begin with a once-a-day feeding. Your baby may not eat much in the beginning, but give him/her time to get used to the new experience. Some babies need practice keeping food in their mouths and swallowing.

It is recommended to introduce one food at a time, serving it alone for 3 days so you can monitor your baby for an unusual reaction or allergy to the food. After 3 days you can introduce new type of food for your baby. You can also mix the vegetables or fruits that your baby has had without any reaction.

Once your baby gets used to his/her new diet, he/she will be ready for a few tablespoons of food a day.

Around 8 months old you can introduce meat, poultry, lentils and dairy products to your baby's diet.

Once your baby is doing well with his first foods, slowly introduce a more varied diet. Gradually make the food a thicker consistency. Try offering mashed or minced food, including some pieces. You can begin to offer most of the food your family eats before adding salt and hot spices to your food.

It is also very important for your baby to participate to family meals. You can be able to eat your own meal and feed your baby at the same time.

## **5. DO I NEED ANY SPECIAL EQUIPMENT?**

It is helpful to have some equipment to feed your baby such as:

- Soft-tipped plastic spoons to protect your baby's soft gums.
- Plastic plates and bowls.
- Cotton or waterproof bibs which are easy to rinse off.
- A high chair or other secure seat that holds your baby up right to eat.
- If you are making your own baby food you will need a tool to puree the food such as a blender and some storage containers for refrigerating and freezing extra portions.

## **6. DO I STILL NEED TO GIVE MY BABY BREAST MILK OR FORMULA?**

The WHO recommends breastfeeding accompanied with solid food until your baby gets 2 years old. If you have stopped breastfeeding you can give your baby formula milk instead. Both breast and formula milk provide important vitamins, iron, and protein in an easy to digest form. In addition, solid food can't replace all the nutrients that breast milk or formula provides during the first 2 years of your baby's life.

## **7. HOW CAN I KNOW WHEN MY BABY IS FULL?**

Babies don't eat for pleasure at this age. They eat because they are hungry. So let your child do the regulation and eat as much as he/she wants.

Simple signs can also show that your baby is full such as leaning back in the chair, turning the head away from the food, refusing to open the mouth for the next bite or playing with the spoon.

## **8. HOW MANY TIMES A DAY SHOULD MY BABY EAT SOLID FOOD?**

The first week would be a tasting experience for your baby. She/he might only eat few spoons and prefer having breast or formula milk. Once your baby gets used to the new experience he/she can start having a small jar of solid food daily.

Around 6 to 7 months, two meals a day is the norm.

Around 8 months your baby should be eating solid food 3 times a day.

## **9. COULD MY BABY HAVE A FOOD ALLERGY?**

It's possible specially if there's a family history of allergy. According to the Centers for Disease and Control (CDC) in 2011, based on the agency's National Health Interview Survey, 4.6 percent of children younger than 18 years of age have a food allergy.

## **10. WHAT FOODS MIGHT MY BABY BE ALLERGIC TO?**

Your baby might be allergic to any food, but these food groups are responsible for 90 percent of food allergies:

- Egg specially the white
- Cow's milk
- Peanuts and peanuts butter
- Wheat
- Gluten contained in wheat, oats and barley
- Soy
- Nuts (walnuts, cashew and Brazil nuts)
- Fish (salmon, tuna, cod, sardines and mackerel)
- Shellfish (lobster, shrimps, prawns and crab)

## **11. WHAT HAPPENS IF MY BABY HAS AN ALLERGIC REACTION TO A FOOD?**

If your baby is allergic to a food, his/her body treats the food like an invader and launches an immune-system attack. Sometimes the body makes an antibody (IgE) that can detect the food. If your baby eats the food again, the antibody tells your baby's immune system to release substances such as histamine to fight the "invader".

These substances cause common allergy symptoms such as:

- Hives (intense itching skin reaction)
- Swelling in the mouth and throat
- Trouble breathing.
- Gastrointestinal problems like vomiting, diarrhea and crying due of stomach pain
- Eczema and rashes
- Runny nose
- Sneezing

These symptoms usually show up within minutes to 2 hours after eating a specific food.

**Call our hotline immediately or drive your baby to an emergency room if your baby ever seems to be having trouble breathing, or has swelling of the face or lips.**

Call your pediatrician if your baby develops severe diarrhea or vomiting or other allergic symptoms.

Always make sure that anyone who takes care of your baby (babysitters, relatives, daycare workers) knows about your baby's allergy and what he/she should eat. And make sure they know exactly what to do if your baby has an allergic reaction.

## **12. CAN FOOD ALLERGY BE TREATED?**

There are no medications that cure or prevent allergic reactions to foods. The key to preventing an allergic reaction is strict avoidance of the food.

### **13. WHICH TYPE OF FOODS CAN BE DELAYED OR MIGHT BE UNSAFE FOR MY BABY?**

There are some foods that you should definitely avoid before 1 year and might be unsafe for your baby:

- Honey: It can cause a potentially dangerous disease called infant botulism
- Whole cow's milk because the milk proteins and fat can irritate your baby's stomach.
- Citrus fruits because the acidity can be irritating to your baby's stomach.
- Sugar
- Salt
- Soft and sticky foods like marshmallows and jelly or gummy candies can get lodged in your baby's throat.

### **14. WHAT'S FOOD INTOLERANCE?**

Food intolerance doesn't involve the immune system. If your baby has food intolerance, it may mean that he/she has trouble digesting a particular food. You may notice that every time your baby eats a specific food she/he is plagued with digestive symptoms such as gas, bloating or diarrhea. The most common one is lactose intolerance. People who are lactose intolerant lack the enzyme necessary to digest the sugar in cow's milk and other dairy products.

### **15. HOW TO PREVENT CHOKING?**

Whether your baby is eating purees or food with more texture, it's always important to watch carefully and take precautions to prevent choking. Babies should always be fed sitting upright in a high chair, not reclining in a swing or car seat. And never offer baby foods that are clear choking hazards such as: nuts, large pieces of fruits, vegetables, or meat, carrots, seeds, popcorn...

### **16. HOW AND WHEN TO INTRODUCE FINGER FOOD TO MY BABY?**

Between 8 and 10 months old, most babies develop the "pincer grip" which allows them to pick up small objects between their thumb and forefinger. They can handle small portions of food and enjoy self feeding. It is important to start offering your baby finger foods such as a sandwich, baby biscuit, slices of banana, and slices of cooked vegetables or pasta.