

Starting solids

How to make every bite count

When to start?

The latest Infant Feeding Guidelines recommend introducing solids at around 6 months of age.

From 6 months, the baby's iron stores become depleted and breast milk or formula alone no longer meets their increasing nutritional needs.

Start with iron-rich foods

Iron-rich foods are recommended as first foods at around 6 months of age to prevent iron deficiency which can affect your baby's health and development.

Which foods when?

Other foods can be introduced in any order and at any rate as long as they are nutritious and the texture is suitable for the baby's stage of development.

After 12 months, your baby should be consuming family foods consistent with the Australian Dietary Guidelines, including a variety of vegetables, fruit, wholegrain cereals and grains, meat, fish and poultry.

How much food does my baby need?

Children have a natural ability to adjust the amount they eat according to their needs and growth patterns. Every child is different; some days they will eat more than other days.

Continue to consistently offer small portions of nutritious foods and trust your child to decide how much to eat at each meal and over the day.

Milk

While solids are being introduced, breastfeeding is recommended until around 23 months of age. If breastfeeding is not possible, use a suitable infant formula until 12 months of age. Cow's milk can be given as a main drink from 12 months of age and should be limited to 500ml a day.

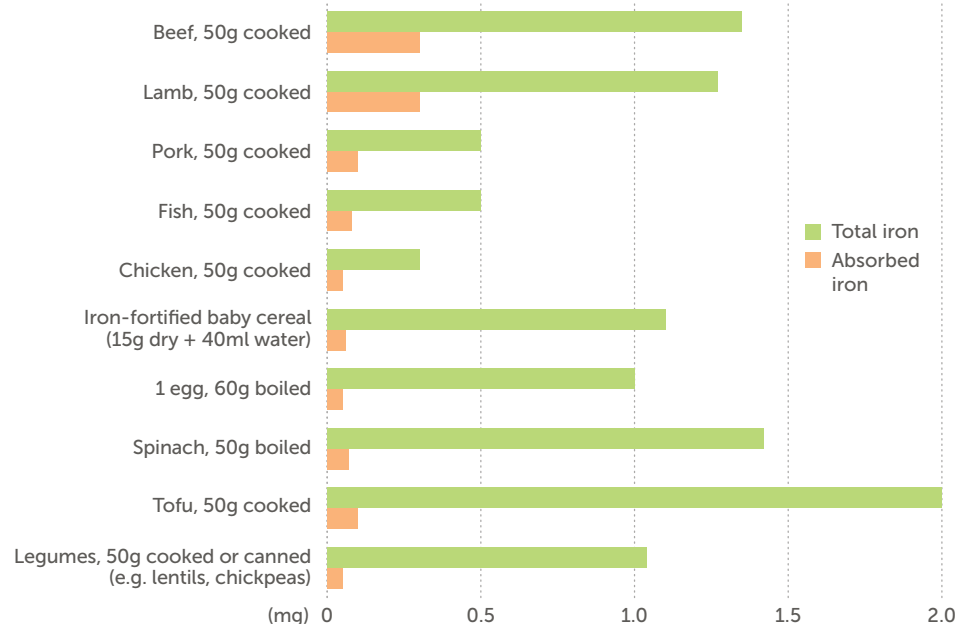
Allergies

There is no need to delay the introduction of nutritious foods such as cooked eggs or peanut butter, as there is no evidence that this reduces the risk of allergies. For food safety reasons, it is best to avoid honey and raw eggs before 12 months of age.

Iron-rich foods

- The best sources of iron are meat, fish and poultry because they contain haem iron which is well absorbed by the body.
- Red meat, such as beef and lamb, is highest in haem iron and recommended 3 to 4 times a week to meet iron needs. Start with 1-2 tablespoon and increase to larger portion sizes (e.g. small steak) from 13 months.
- Other plant food sources of iron, which do not contain haem iron, are less well absorbed by the body.
- Carefully choose suitable food alternatives that are high in iron if your baby is on a meat-free diet.
- Serving plant foods with vitamin C-rich foods, such as half an orange, can help increase iron absorption.
- Use the graph below to choose suitable iron-rich food choices for your baby.

Iron rich foods



Food textures for developmental stages

Babies can vary in the time needed to progress through each stage.
Depending on the type of food and your babies development, you can go straight to the lumpy mushy or finger food stage.



The “Silky, Smooth” stage

Around 6 months of age, red meat is suitable for babies and an important addition to the diet.

- For a smooth texture, meat must be tender and moist. Puree meat with boiled water or casserole juices.
- Blend meat with a variety of different vegetables such as zucchini, pumpkin and sweet potato.



Adult meal



The “Lumpy, Mushy” stage

Around 7 months of age, it is important to encourage your baby to chew varying kinds of textures and not stay on silky smooth foods too long. This helps to develop muscles for chewing and speech.

- Progress the texture to include small, fork mashed soft lumps.
- Your baby is able to chew foods even without teeth.
- It is normal for babies to gag (but not choke) on lumpy foods when they are learning to chew. They may also spit food out. Don't be concerned. It is all part of the learning process.



The Finger Food stage

Around 8 months of age, your baby's hand control improves. As soon as they are able to grasp objects, encourage them to feed themselves by offering soft finger foods.

- Cut food into small pieces which can easily be managed or held onto for chewing.
- Avoid hard foods such as raw carrot, celery, apple or whole nuts as these foods are potential choking risks. Large round foods such as grapes and sausage can also pose a choking risk; however these can be simply cut in half or quarters.



The Toddler stage

Around 12 months of age, your toddler will start exerting their independence. They can be picky about when and what foods they will eat.

It is important you maintain control of the food on offer!

- Let your toddler choose what to eat from a limited choice of only nutritious foods.
- Avoid encouraging or rewarding them with less nutritious treats for finishing their plate.
- If your toddler does not eat as much as you think they should, do not offer favourite alternatives – even if they are nutritious e.g. cow's milk.
- Make water the only drink of choice at meal time as filling up on milk and juices can reduce appetite and displace good food sources of iron and zinc.
- If your baby or toddler rejects a new food, offer it again until the food becomes familiar and accepted.
- Never leave your baby or toddler alone while they are eating or let them wander as they eat.

For tips and meal ideas on preparing meat for your baby and on how to adapt the family meal to feed your baby and toddler, get our brochure “How to make every bite count” from mlahealthymeals.com.au