

## Introduction of Solid Food to Infants

### WHEN is it the right time to introduce solids to the term infant?

- “Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for the first six months of life for healthy term infants. Breast-fed and formula-fed infants should be introduced to nutrient-rich, solid foods with particular attention to iron at six months with continued breastfeeding for up to two years and beyond”<sup>1</sup>.

### WHEN is it the right time to introduce solids to the preterm infant?

- There is no official or evidenced-based guideline; however it is suggested to introduce solids based on developmental readiness, skills and abilities, usually at 5 to 6 months corrected age.

### WHY wait until 6 months?

- For healthy term infants, breastmilk (plus vitamin D supplementation) provides adequate nutrition and supports normal growth<sup>2</sup>.
- For healthy term infants born to mothers with good iron status, breastmilk provides adequate iron therefore there is no indication to start solids earlier<sup>2</sup>.
- Exclusive breastfeeding until age 6 months decreases the risk of infections<sup>3</sup>.
- Adding solid food earlier tends to displace breastmilk<sup>4,5</sup> and/or formula<sup>6</sup>, which are key sources of energy and essential fatty acids<sup>2,7,8</sup>.
- Introducing high-nitrate vegetables (home-prepared carrots, spinach, turnips and beets) before age 6 months can be associated with methemoglobinemia<sup>9</sup>; high-nitrate vegetables do not need to be avoided after 6 months of age<sup>10</sup>.

### WHY start at 6 months?

- A baby's requirements for several nutrients including iron are greater at 6 months<sup>11</sup>.
- A variety of textures should be introduced between 6-10 months to help develop eating skills and improve acceptance of more foods later in life<sup>2,12</sup>.
- Most babies are developmentally ready for solid foods at around 6 months when they:
  - Sit and hold their head up, and
  - Watch and open their mouth for a spoon and close their lips around the spoon<sup>13</sup>.

### Myths about introducing solids before 6 months

- *Myth: Babies need solid foods before 6 months for proper growth.*  
**Fact:** Exclusive breastfeeding until 6 months supports normal growth and development<sup>1,14</sup>.
- *Myth: Adding solids will help infants sleep through the night.*  
**Fact:** It is normal for babies to wake to breastfeed at night during the first year of life<sup>15</sup>. These feeds can be an important source of fat and energy for some babies<sup>16</sup>. The introduction of solids has been shown not to affect sleep<sup>17</sup>.

### Practice Points

- Recommend exclusive breastfeeding until 6 months
- Recommend waiting until 6 months to introduce solid foods
- Recommend iron-rich foods such as well-cooked, finely-minced meat, poultry, fish or single-grain iron-fortified infant cereal as first foods

## WHAT foods should be introduced first?

- The first foods in an infant's diet should contain iron<sup>18</sup>, such as well-cooked, finely-minced meat, poultry, fish or a single-grain iron-fortified infant cereal<sup>3,19</sup>.
  - Additional iron sources include cooked egg yolk, lentils, beans and tofu.
  - Iron from foods of animal origin is better absorbed than iron from plant sources<sup>18</sup>.
- At 6 months, babies can eat well-mashed and well-minced foods<sup>21</sup>.
- Following the introduction of iron-rich foods, vegetables, fruits and grain products can be added; offer one new food at a time<sup>19</sup>.
- Cottage cheese, plain yogurt, and small pieces of hard cheese like cheddar or gouda, and pasteurized soft cheese may be introduced at 9 months of age<sup>19</sup>.
- Small amounts of whole cow's milk can be introduced in a cup at 9 -12 months<sup>19</sup>, but it is recommended that breastfeeding continue until age 2 years and beyond.

## Parent Resources

- BC Health File # 69C Baby's First Foods, May 2007: [www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/pdf/hfile69c.pdf](http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/pdf/hfile69c.pdf)
- What To Feed Your Baby - A Sample Meal Plan For Baby in the First Year: [www.dialadietitian.org/nutritioncat.asp?id=59](http://www.dialadietitian.org/nutritioncat.asp?id=59)
- Toddlers First Steps: [www.health.gov.bc.ca/children/initiatives/toddler.html](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/children/initiatives/toddler.html)
- Dial-a-Dietitian: 604-732-9191 or toll free 1-800-667-3438 or [www.dialadietitian.org](http://www.dialadietitian.org)
- Public Health Units: look in the Blue Pages under Health Authorities, Public Health Services

## References

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The Community Nutritionists' Council of BC is comprised of Registered Dietitians who provide community nutrition services through public health units and affiliated programs in BC's Health Authorities.

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