

Babies & Eating

(New foods, allergies and lactose intolerance)



Laying down healthy eating and drinking habits is very important. Water is vital! Teach your children to drink water very often, and avoid getting them into the habit of having juice or sugary drinks. We all need to drink plenty of water to be healthy and right from the start is the way to go!

Eat well, live well!

Life can be quite miserable for everyone if you feel that you have to battle with toddlers over what they eat or refuse to eat!

If you provide a variety of healthy foods, no child will starve or end up malnourished.

You don't need to become stressed about food, just keep providing healthy choices and the kids will be fine.

If you are concerned, try keeping a list of what your toddler eats for a week. If you are still worried when you read the list, check with your doctor or Early Childhood Clinic at Community Health (6620 2967).

An appropriate vitamin supplement for young children might be useful in setting your mind at rest, and this may mean that you have less conflict over meals.

Introducing new foods

It is recommended that from 4-6 months when your child is ready, consider introducing a new food every 2-3 days according to what the family usually eats (regardless of whether the food is thought to be highly allergenic). Give one new food at a time so that reactions can be more clearly identified. If a food is tolerated, continue to give this as a part of a varied diet. Specific food choices will depend on what the family eats.

Start with smooth, pureed foods like plain cereals (e.g. rice, oats, and semolina) then add other foods such as smooth, cooked vegetables and smooth, cooked fruits, pureed meats.

Move on to mashed foods and finger foods such as meats and fish and a wider variety of vegetables, fresh fruits, cereals and legumes. Also introduce yoghurt, egg custard and nut pastes.

Move on to a chopped texture. Drinks can be offered from a cup (from a developmental perspective, this is usually around 8 months). Continue to increase variety as above, for example, bread, crackers, pasta, wheat based breakfast cereals, cow's milk on cereal, cheese, egg, fish, other seafood, nut products and foods containing nuts.

This is just a guide and is not intended to indicate precisely when specific foods should be offered. You may also refer to local health department infant feeding advice or guidelines. Take care to prevent choking on food: grate, cook or mash all hard fruits or vegetables and do not give your infant foods that have small hard pieces such as raw apple, carrot or whole nuts.

Tucker Tantrums!

Don't buy into a food war. Despite your fears, it's highly unlikely your child will starve themselves. Try to relax and realise children will eat when they're hungry - and avoid too much snacking. Children will eat well when dinner or lunch is the only option and they've become hungry enough to actually accept what's on offer. Below are a few more tips on avoiding the 'food wars'.

- Add some fun to mealtimes by allowing your child to pick out a special placemat, bowl, plate and cup next time you go shopping. She will naturally want to use them - after all, they're more fun when there's something to fill them up with!
- Introduce a dinner timer (such as a small alarm or a bell) and have your child tell you when he hears it.



- Let them help. Ask your children to help you serve the dinner, and set the table. It always feels good to be a part of things.

- Be creative. Mash your child's veggies and arrange them into the first letter of his name. Cut toast into squares, triangles or stars. Cookie cutters are ideal for this.

- The wishing game. Your child gets to make a wish for every bite he takes! Keep the wishes simple and easy to fulfill.

- If all else fails, call in a puppet. You might feel silly holding a spoon with your hand in a puppet, but your child may be more likely to take the food from it than you.

Foods to avoid for babies

It is recommend that from 4-6 months when your child is ready, consider introducing a new food every 2-3 days according to what the family usually eats (regardless of whether the food is thought to be highly allergenic). Give one new food at a time so that reactions can be more clearly identified. If a food is tolerated, continue to give this as a part of a varied diet. Specific food choices will depend on what the family eats.

Honey

Should be avoided for babies under one year old, since it contains spores of the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*, which can cause food poisoning in infants. Foods for babies should be offered in their natural, unsweetened state to help prevent the possibility of tooth decay.

Salt

Baby's immature kidneys are unable to cope with large amounts of salt, so salt should be kept to the absolute minimum. Avoid adding any salt to baby foods.

Nuts

Whole nuts should be avoided for children less than five years of age as they are a common cause of choking. If there is a family history of nut allergies, take care when introducing them into your child's diet and stay alert for any reactions. After 9 months, try homemade nut pastes (cashew, almond etc) which can be ground in a coffee-grinder (kept exclusively for nuts) and spread onto baby's toast.

Shellfish

Shellfish are another common allergy food that is best kept out of infant's diets until they are at least 12 months. When introducing seafood into your baby's diet, stay tuned for any allergenic reactions, especially if there is a family history.

Never give raw shellfish to babies or children as they are a common cause of food poisoning.

Cordials and fizzy drinks

Avoid giving your baby sugary drinks as they not only promote tooth decay, but also condition your baby's taste to sweet foods and drinks. Use fresh juices when you feel like giving baby a change, but dilute it heavily with filtered water. Sugary drinks also contain artificial additives which are best avoided.

Dairy products {milk, yogurt, cheese}

Another very common allergenic food source that require careful monitoring when introducing into the diet. In general, dairy and whole eggs can be given to infants of 12 months or older.

Allergies

An allergy is a signal that the immune system has become over-sensitive to something in our environment. The immune system then tries to protect us from things that most immune systems don't worry about - such as pollen or house-dust. An allergy is an abnormal response to a foreign invader.

In 90% of cases, a food allergy is caused by one of the following foods: milk, wheat, seeds, nuts (especially peanuts), soy products and shellfish. When babies first start solids, take care to introduce each new food slowly and stay alert for any adverse reactions.

Common symptoms of allergies include: diarrhea and abdominal pain, vomiting, rashes and swelling of lips and mouth - but it's unlikely that all reactions will occur at the same time.

Boost children's immune systems with a whole-food diet, rich in fruit and vegetables, grains, pulses and beans, unrefined oils (such as olive oil) and oily fish. If you give your children a daily multivitamin, this ensures that they are getting adequate nutrients to protect and enhance their immune system. Stay alert for suspect foods and remove a particular food from the child's diet for a month or more. When introducing it again be on the lookout for reactions.

If you suspect a food allergy see the dietitian at your Community Health Centre.



Lactose Intolerance

If your older child seems to get loose poos and tummy pains after drinking milk, you will need to see a doctor to be sure of the reason and to get information about ways to give them the foods they need for healthy growth and development.

If your young bottle fed baby is unsettled with lots of watery or frothy poos, you need to check with your doctor as there could be many reasons for this.

If your doctor does say that your baby probably has 'lactose intolerance' you need to know that this will not harm your baby as long as she or he is otherwise well and growing normally. It makes babies uncomfortable, but they still get all the nutrition they need.

Lactose intolerance does not cause vomiting or eczema.

Soy formulas have all the nutrition a baby needs for good health and growth, but they do not prevent allergy. If a baby is at risk of allergies (based on family history), it is better to use an HA [hypo-allergenic] cows' milk formula.

You don't have to introduce foods to your child in any special order. If you want to give your baby a taste of tofu at age 6 months, go ahead, even though it's not listed on our chart until age 8 months. And while cereal is a traditional first food in Australia, it's fine to start with mashed fruits or vegetables instead.

Want more information?

Parentline NSW

Phone 1300 1300 52
For advice on child health and parenting
www.parentline.org.au

Healthdirect

Phone 1800 022 222, 24 hours To speak to a registered nurse
www.healthdirect.gov.au

Raising Children

The Australian Parenting Website. For information on raising children, including information for grandparents raising children.

<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>

Families NSW

Various resources to help parents at any stage in life.
www.families.nsw.gov.au

Kids Spot

<http://www.kidspot.com.au>

Nutrition Australia

<http://nutritionaustralia.org/national/resource/infant-nutrition>

Department of Health

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/gug-director-toc~gug-solids>

Local Services

Goonellabah Child & Family Health Service

Phone 02 6625 0111
9am – 4:30pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

Lismore Community Health - Child and Family

Phone 02 6620 7687
8am – 5:00pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

Family Support Network

Family Workers can offer you practical and emotional support to enhance & strengthen your parenting & family relationships.
Phone: 02 6621 2489
www.fsn.org.au