

kizingo®

4 Signs Your Baby is Ready for **SOLID FOODS**



... Welcome

In our conversations with new parents, the thing that seems to cause the most stress is not whether or not they have the right spoon to feed their baby, it's when and how and how much and what they should feed their baby. It's anxiety that stems from the very thought of giving food - especially the wrong food - and starting their baby off on the wrong foot from day one.

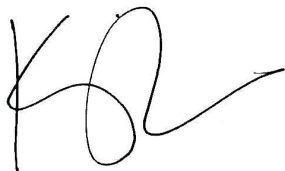
So, I'd like to talk about introducing solid foods to babies. This is often referred to as weaning, but giving your baby solid foods doesn't have to mean that you plan to stop them from breast or bottle feeding.

Exposing your baby to solid foods is about more than just sustenance, especially when they are very young. They experience benefits beyond maintaining their nutritional status when they are allowed to explore food, which is what makes the idea of giving solid foods so exciting.

When you can embrace the idea that introducing solid foods is less about getting them the "proper" nutrition and more about giving them a chance to explore food, you have a lot more freedom. And a lot more fun.

Are you ready? Sure you are ... and we've got your back!

Happy feeding,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'KOL' with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

A caveat: Many studies have identified vulnerable populations for whom recommendations about when to introduce solid foods and how long to breast feed do not apply, or for whom the recommendations are different. In the subsequent pages I am speaking to parents who live in developed countries, where the risk of intestinal and respiratory illness associated with the early elimination of breast feeding are rare, and to parents who have healthy full-term babies. As always, if you have questions, consult your own child's medical professional.

Let's begin at the beginning ...

There are many indications typically used to determine if a child is ready to begin eating solid foods. Some are physical and mechanical which tend to be a little easier to observe, while others are more emotional in nature, and might be more difficult to identify.

None are hard and fast rules, and you do not need to see evidence of all of them before your child is ready. And tasting and eating are, believe it or not, two very different things.

So while your little one might not need to be ready for a full solid-food meal, she might be ready to start exploring solid foods.

In the following pages we'll look at each one of these signs in a little more detail.

Hopefully, not having hard and fast rules brings a sense of **freedom**, not fear.

... the 4 signs in detail

AGE

Numerous agencies in the US and Europe including the World Health Organization (WHO), the American Academy of Pediatrics, and governments in most countries of the European Union recommend nothing but breast milk - or formula for the non-breast fed baby - for the first 6 months of life.

This recommendation, first made by the WHO in 2002, is based on a large body of evidence which examined optimal infant growth and development of illness and infection in babies with differing durations of breast feeding.

These agencies concluded that breast milk was adequate to provide all the nutrients needed in the first 6 months of life, except in very particular circumstances, after which point solid foods may be necessary to ensure proper consumption of all nutrients, vitamins, and minerals.

After 6 months of age, children are ready to begin experimenting with solid foods.



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PHYSICAL ABILITY

It is no coincidence that 6 months is the age used as a suggestion for the introduction of solid foods because it coincides, approximately, with the growth and neuromotor development that is considered necessary before infants can safely and adequately consume solid or semi-solid foods. There are several cues that can be used as signs that your baby is ready including:

Sitting Up – Being able to sit unassisted is a key indicator of readiness for eating solid foods. This recommendation based on safety, and an indication that other aspects of physical development are in place (like swallowing and the loss of the tongue thrust reflex).

Other recommendations state that a baby does not necessarily need to be able to sit unsupported, but he does need to be able to hold his head up and sit supported without slumping over.

For some children this may occur before 6 months of age, and, depending on the child, may occur before other signs of readiness appear.



Tongue thrust reflex – Tongue thrust is a normal occurrence in infants and describes the reflex – the involuntary movement - in very young babies that causes their tongue to come forward when something enters their mouth. This reflex helps produce the sucking action which is necessary for breast or bottle feeding, and is why your son is always pushing his tongue out of his mouths when anything goes into it. In time, this reflex begins to disappear and a spoon, for example, put into his mouth is not immediately pushed back out.

This often coincides with the ability to actively use his tongue move food from the front to the back of the mouth and down the throat. (Believe it or not, this has to be learned. Practice makes perfect!) From what I can tell, there seems to be a lot of confusion about how to know if this reflex is gone.

... *test the reflex* ...

Try touching a spoon to your little one's lips. If his tongue comes out, pushing the spoon away, he still has a strong reflex. Wait a little while – a few days to a week – and try again. It will eventually go away!

Pincher grasp – When baby's first learn to grab for things they use their whole hand, fully palming an object in order to pick it up. Eventually, your baby will develop the more nuanced and careful **pincher grasp, picking things up with her thumb and finger(s)**. This pincher grasp generally develops between 7 and 12 months of age, but there seems to be a large (and normal) range of ages when this first appears and is mastered.



Digestive tract – Although not a sign of readiness that can be easily observed, it is important to include a discussion of the growth and development of the digestive tract.

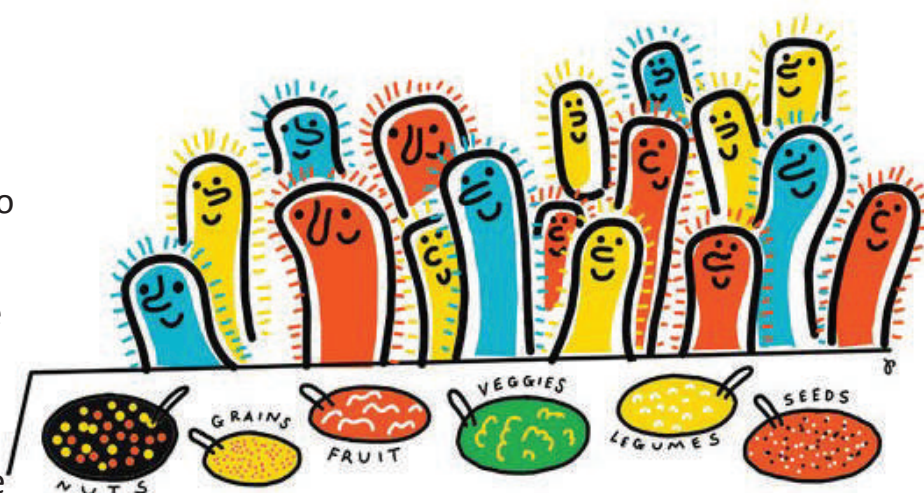
At birth the infant's digestive tract is not fully developed, meaning that the enzymes needed to digest and fully absorb nutrients, although it is mature, is not very efficient. So although young babies are able to handle various nutrients they are not able to fully absorb them.

Even breast milk is not fully absorbed in the very young. For example only about 96% of triglycerides (a type of fat molecule) in human milk are absorbed at 1.5 months of age. Most cooked starches are digested and absorbed almost completely, but that which isn't digested in the intestine continues to be digested further down the digestive tract by microbiota living in the colon.

Beginning around 4 months of age, infants begin to secrete the enzymes necessary to digest proteins, but their capacity to do so is limited and ranges from about 5.5 – 7.0 ounces (160-200 g) per meal for a 6-8 month old.

... fun fact ...

The microbiota necessary for the digestion of starch seems to increase as more demands are made on it, suggesting that the introduction of a variety of carbohydrates is necessary for supporting full maturation of the digestive tract.

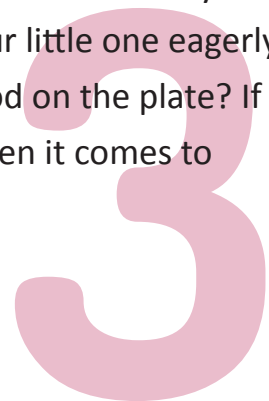




INTEREST & IMITATION

One of the surest signs that your baby is ready for solid foods is her “asking” for it. Your child may intently watch as you eat, following the fork as it moves from the table to your mouth. She might open her mouth when you do, especially when prompted to do so, or try to grab at the muffin you’re eating for breakfast.

The more you allow your infant to be a part of meal time – sitting at the table with you while you eat – the more likely you are to observe this interest. Is your little one eagerly grabbing for cups, silverware, serving dishes, plates ... or even the food on the plate? If so, there is no doubt she is interested in doing what you are doing when it comes to meal time.



YOU ARE READY!



This may seem silly, but **your readiness (and willingness) to begin the process of introducing solid foods to your baby is going to be one of the best predictors of success.**

The transition from breast or bottle feeding to eating solid foods can be an emotional time for parents as it signals the end of one period of infancy and the beginning of another. Moms who are breast feeding, especially, may have to struggle with letting go of being the person that their baby relies on most for sustenance.

Introducing foods also requires patience: it's going to get messy (literally) and there will be times when your baby (and toddler!) is not going to want to eat the food you make for him. But, if you stay calm, you are consistent with how you offer foods, and you continue to patiently introduce a wide variety of foods to your baby you will both find the process more enjoyable - and ultimately more successful.



... so is YOUR baby ready?

It's all well and good to talk about the host of signs which may appear in any baby, but what about your baby? What if your son is reaching for your food, clearly watching and interested while the family eats dinner, but it's yet able to fully support himself sitting and still grabs for objects with his whole fist? Does this mean that he can't start experimenting with solid (or semi-solid) food?

Of course not! Children develop at different rates and physical milestones will be reached in different orders and at different times.

I'll use my own experience to highlight this. When my oldest started on solids she was very interested in the food that her dad and I were eating, but she was still learning how to sit unsupported and her early meals were on our lap. With my second child, he was not interested in food until he was a fair bit older, and by the time he started eating solid food he was sitting on his own, had a fully developed pincher grasp, and was in a chair at the table with us. My youngest was always extremely interested in what the rest of us are eating and was fully able to support herself sitting up before her pincher grasp had developed.



Remember, at this point the act of introducing solid food is not about getting them to eat the food as much as it is about getting them to experience the food. Let them partake in family mealtimes by joining you at the table, having them sit on your lap if they can't sit by themselves; give them (appropriate) spoons and cups to hold; let them play with pots on the kitchen floor while you cook. Infants are extremely attuned to emotional cues at this age as well, so if you are tense and anxious around food your baby is likely to be tense and anxious as well. Try to relax; you and your baby are likely to have a lot more fun that way!