



FIRST FOODS FOR BABIES

LEARNING HUB YOUR BABY'S FIRST SOLID FOODS – CLEVER CHOICES FOR HEALTHY TEETH AND BODIES

Your Baby's First Solid Foods – Clever Choices for Healthy Teeth and Bodies

Did you know that dental decay affects a third of children under the age of six? And were you aware that a child's first foods play a crucial role in preventing it? Getting your baby or toddler to eat the right foods is rarely easy – especially if you have a fussy eater on your hands. But it's worth persevering to give your little one the best start to life.

So it's time for your baby to start eating solids

By the time your baby is around six months old, breastmilk will no longer meet all their nutritional needs. This means it's time to start solid foods.

The food choices you make for babies and toddlers from this point on will have a big influence on their future taste preferences. But just as importantly, they're also strongly linked to diseases such as tooth decay, high blood pressure, obesity and heart disease.

Don't panic – we've got you covered

This all might sound a bit alarming, and we get it. Suddenly mealtime has gone from a fun (and probably messy) part of your day, to something that feels as much pressure as selecting your child's first school.

But don't push the panic button just yet. Like any milestone – first words, first steps – a child's first foods are an exciting point in your child's development.

And there are ways to help make sure your baby eats (and doesn't spit out!) the best foods for them.

How food preferences are shaped

Believe it or not, your baby first started learning about flavours in the womb!

That's right, the mother's diet is a child's first introduction to flavour. And this education continues as they progress to breastmilk, formula and first foods.

Sure, some of your baby's taste preferences are hardwired. But the good news is, early food exposure and social interactions normally outweigh genetics.

And that means your actions can set your child on the path towards lifelong health.

What are the best first foods for my baby?

It's best to serve a variety of foods early, starting with purees and moving towards lumpy textures. A great place to begin is a vegetable your child has seen you eat – mixed and pureed with breastmilk or formula.

Best first baby foods:

- Pureed vegetables and fruit, such as sweet potato, carrots, pumpkin, broccoli, pear, apple or banana
- Wholegrain oats or brown rice cereal
- Small quantities of grated cheese and plain unsweetened yoghurt
- Pureed iron-rich foods, such as lean meats and fish
- Other iron-rich proteins, including well-cooked egg, tofu, lentils, chickpeas and beans

As your baby gets older and develops chewing skills, you can move onto single solids and soft finger foods. This will usually happen at around 6-18 months.

A little bit of sugar is okay, right?

The suggested amount of added sugar for children up to 2 years of age is ZERO teaspoons per day.

Yes, you read that correctly. ZERO.

This means avoiding the obvious treats foods like biscuits, lollies, chocolate and cakes – but it also includes **dried fruits** and **fruit juice**.

And while it's okay for them to eat fresh fruit in small amounts, they can damage teeth when eaten too frequently. Recommended fruit servings:

- 0-2 years: 1/2 a serve per day
- 2-3 years: 1 serve per day
- 4-8 years 1.5 serves per day

Beware not to 'carb-load'

White rice cereal is a common first food choice for babies, and often goes on to become a staple part of their diet. However, white rice, flour and other refined carbohydrates **turn into sugars as your baby digests them**.

This means they can hardwire your child's preference for sweets.

It's best to consider these 'sometimes' foods – not for every day. And definitely not every meal.

Because of early diet choices, many children go on to prefer eating white or beige foods for every meal and snack. This is a leading cause of tooth decay in young children, even when they're not eating sweets on a regular basis.

How and when to feed your baby

At Norwest Paediatric Dentistry, we follow the **Ellyn Satter philosophy** – which means the following:

You control what, when and where your baby or toddler eats. And your child decides whether they're going to eat what's on offer, and how much of it.

When your child moves to solids, it's important they have at least a two-hour break between meals and snacks. Teeth and tummies need this time to rest.

Eating more frequently than this can lead to tooth decay, even if the food is low in sugars.

When babies resist new foods

Not trusting new foods is a normal response that protects your baby from eating something that might be poisonous.

Children typically start showing distrust towards new foods at around 18 months – which is also the age they can start to wander off by themselves.

Before this phase, babies will happily put almost anything in their mouths to sample, even if they proceed to spit it out.

Babies and toddlers may need between six and 16 introductions to a flavour before they will accept it.

Try not to get discouraged during this critical window for food introduction. While it is hard to see your cooking efforts rejected, repeated offerings are likely to pay off.

How to get your baby to try new food

New foods must be introduced in a positive and relaxed environment. Children who are pressured to eat certain foods may develop a dislike for them later on.

The best way to get your baby to eat any new food is to offer it as part of a meal.

You can try this by offering the new food as their first mouthful at mealtime for 10 days straight. Be sure to also include a food your child likes (or at least tolerates) in each meal as a fall back.

If your baby rejects the new food, take it away with no fuss and continue feeding the preferred foods and try again the next day.

Some new tastes take longer to acquire than others. But continually introducing small amounts of healthy foods into your child's diet until they are accepted will pave the way for a future of good eating habits.

Key take-aways

- The early choices you make for your child have a big influence on their future taste preferences.
- Healthy taste preferences and making good food choices leads to strong teeth and a healthy body.
- Pureed vegetables, wholegrains and proteins are the best first foods for your baby.
- Limit white carbs (like rices and cereals) and fruits – and avoid dried fruit and fruit juice altogether.
- Make sure you leave at least a two-hour gap between meals and snacks.
- It's normal for babies and toddlers to reject new foods.
- It can take between six and 16 introductions to a new food or flavour before your child will accept it.

And remember – you've got this! With the right food choices and perseverance, your child will develop healthy flavour preferences that will set them up for life.

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