



## Eat Your Greens with Dr. Black | plant-based nutrition for the whole family

The first year of life is an exciting and precious time where every day brings a new delight as you watch your newborn grow and learn about the world they've been born into. Feeding and nourishing your baby is no exception. But sometimes this process can be fraught with worry and parents often have doubts about how to go about introducing baby's first foods. Whether you're a first-time parent or just want to keep up to date with the latest recommendations on infant feeding, you've come to the right place.

### **When to Start:**

Naturally, every baby is different, but most babies are ready to start eating at around six months of age. If your baby was premature, they may need to wait until a little bit older and it's important to talk to your pediatrician or a developmental specialist to help guide the timing of introducing foods. Some signs that your baby is ready to start eating solid food include being able to sit in a highchair and keep their head steady, showing interest in food, and using their hands to bring objects to their mouth. Last, if you put a spoonful of food in a baby's mouth, and they immediately push it out with their tongue, then they still have that tongue thrust reflex, and they're not ready to start baby foods.

Before we dive into the specifics of introducing solids to your baby, let's discuss the different approaches to baby feeding. There are two main styles: traditional puree feeding and baby-led weaning.

### **Traditional Puree Feeding:**

Traditional feeding involves starting your baby with smooth foods that are pureed or soft enough to mash easily with a fork. You can mix in some breast milk or formula to help thin it out. Don't mix cereal or other purees into baby's bottle. This approach allows your baby to get familiar with using a spoon and exposes them to a variety of flavors. Examples of suitable first foods include avocado, banana, cooked and mashed beans, squash, sweet potatoes, spinach, and kale. Not only is it important to offer a variety of flavors, but texture is also important. Include things that are smooth, lumpy, soggy, and even slimy or slippery.

### **Baby-led Weaning:**

Baby-led weaning is a more recent approach where babies skip purees altogether and start with soft pieces of food that they can pick up and eat on their own. The parents decide what foods to offer and when, while the baby determines which foods they will eat and how much. This method encourages self-regulation and may help babies develop healthier eating habits. However, there is a concern about potential iron deficiency and choking risks. If you choose baby-led weaning, make sure to offer iron-rich foods and minimize choking hazards.



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### Getting Started:

Regardless of the feeding style you choose, there are a few general guidelines to follow. Start with one type of food and offer it for about three to five days before introducing the next food. This allows you to monitor closely for any reactions or allergies. Babies can eat almost any type of food as long as it's not a choking hazard or honey. Begin with just a tablespoon or two of food and gradually increase the quantity as your baby gets more comfortable with eating. If your baby seems to resist feeding by turning their head away or spitting it out, just wait a week or two and try again. It's important to include foods that provide iron and zinc, such as iron-fortified baby cereals, green leafy vegetables, tofu, lentils, eggs, meat, and fish. Avoid foods high in salt, sugar, and unhealthy saturated fat.

**Don't worry if more of it gets on your baby than in your baby - making a mess is part of the learning experience!**

A vegan diet can be healthy even for infants and young children if it's done thoughtfully. Talk to your pediatrician about special considerations to ensure that your baby is getting enough protein, iron, vitamin B12, and omega fatty acids.

### Preventing Choking:

Choking is a major concern when introducing solids, so it's important to take precautions. Make sure your baby is sitting upright while eating and offer small, soft pieces of food that can be mashed easily with their gums. Avoid foods that need to be chewed, such as chunks of meat or crunchy fruits and vegetables. Also, be mindful of round foods like grapes and cherry tomatoes - cut them into small pieces to minimize choking risks. Hot dog slices also pose a choking risk and should be avoided. If your baby is mobile, don't allow them to crawl or walk around with food in their mouth.

There are several [free first aid courses](#) available online that can teach you how to help people of any age who are choking, including infants. I recommend that all parents sign up for one.

### Food Allergy:

We used to recommend that parents wait to offer foods with a high allergy risk until between one and three years of age. Now we know that introducing those foods earlier may actually reduce the risk of developing allergies. This includes peanut butter. Mix a small amount into baby's food or let them taste a small smear on a spoon or pacifier. This introduces the peanut protein to your baby's immune system and may help reduce the risk that they'll be allergic to peanuts.

Children with eczema may have a higher risk of food allergies. If your baby has severe eczema, you may want to see an allergist to help guide the introduction of solid foods. If you become concerned that your baby has a food allergy or intolerance, hold off on that food until you can talk to your pediatrician.



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**The period of introducing solids to your baby is a crucial time for establishing good eating habits. Whether you choose traditional puree feeding or baby-led weaning, the focus should be on exposing your baby to a variety of flavors, textures, and nutrients. Respect your baby's hunger and fullness cues, and avoid pressuring them to eat more than they want. Remember, the goal is to foster a healthy relationship with food and allow your baby to explore and enjoy the world of eating.**

**Enjoy this exciting time of exploration with your baby, and don't forget to capture those adorable messy moments! Happy feeding!**