

Feeding Our Youngest

8 Months

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Last month, we talked about your baby's changing abilities and a gradual increase in food texture and variety. As your baby moves toward eating family-friendly table food — somewhere between 7 and 10 months — you will want to continue to increase the variety and textures of food you offer.

As mentioned in our 4-month newsletter, the allergy advice for feeding infants has changed. Recent research supports introducing a wide variety of solids when your baby is ready for them. Waiting longer or avoiding some foods until baby is a year old, such as eggs, fish, and wheat, does not seem to prevent food allergies. In fact, it may set baby up for allergies later on because new foods help baby's immune system develop. So, introduce a variety of foods during this time of growth and adjustment, and continue to watch your baby for any reactions or signs of intolerance as we talked about in month 6.

Introducing meat can be a challenge, because your baby may have few teeth, and baby teeth aren't the ones that can handle certain types of meat. In addition, baby's mouth and jaw muscles will need to grow, develop, and practice chewing these new textures. So, think about the types of meats that you offer. Ground meats and tender poultry won't pose a problem because they can be finely chopped. Tougher meats may need to be ground or cut up into very tiny pieces. After grinding or cutting, adding a little moisture to the meat — such as breast milk, formula, or even a favorite vegetable — will also help your baby's chewing and swallowing success.



Continue to advance the texture of your baby's food as her skills advance. Use a fork or potato masher to remove large lumps. Although it will be messy in the beginning, your baby will enjoy feeding herself small pieces of a variety of foods. As her abilities grow, she will be able to pick up foods with her fingers instead of palm-grasping them. Mealtime will become neater as she further develops those self-feeding skills.

When your baby tries new foods, she may occasionally gag as she chews and swallows. Gagging is a safety reflex that prevents choking and is caused when a baby puts too much food in their mouth or if a food is too far back in their mouth. Unlike adults, a 7- to 9-month-old baby's gag reflex is situated around the middle of the tongue, so it is expected that they will gag at some point when they start to try solid foods. Gagging is a protective response that helps baby learn about texture and bite size.

Gagging is not the same as choking. Watch your baby closely to see if she is simply gagging, and able to move air and food around, or if she is truly choking and cannot breathe.

Building Block: Feeding and Health Safety Tips



- How to prevent choking:
 - Ensure your baby is always sitting upright during feedings.
 - Make sure the food presented is in the proper shape, size, and texture for the baby.
 - Cut food into long strips they can grab in their fists.
 - Never leave your baby alone with food.
- Avoid foods that can cause choking such as corn, nuts, popcorn, raw carrots, seeds, grapes, or hot dogs. Dice or chop larger chunks of food into smaller pieces.
- Serve baby's food unseasoned — no need for added salt or sugar.
- Avoid sugar-sweetened beverages, caffeine-containing drinks, and herbal teas.



- Avoid processed meats, fried foods, and snack foods like potato chips.
- Don't give baby honey until after a year old, because honey can contain botulism and young infants may become very sick from it.
- Avoid serving foods that are too hot for baby. It's okay to serve foods cold — most babies don't mind.

Next month, we will talk about the importance of finger foods.

Change is the key when feeding your youngest!

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