

# Foods for babies (solids) 2 (questions and answers)

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Remember, the information on this fact sheet should not be used or relied on as an alternative to professional care. If you have a particular problem, see your health care professional.

- Be careful of salty spreads. Use them in small amounts, if desired, after the baby is 12 months old.

### Sugar

Babies do not need added sugar and will happily eat cereals, custards etc. without it. Sugary foods cause tooth decay and sugar gives calories without any food value. It can lead to weight gain or to the child eating less healthy foods.

- Brown sugar and raw sugar are forms of sugar - they are not healthier alternatives.

### Honey

Honey can contain the spores (like seeds) of a germ (*C. botulinum*) which can cause a serious, but rare, health problem (botulism) for babies under 12 months.

- It is not known why it only affects babies under 12 months old.
- Babies with botulism from eating honey can die very quickly if they are not treated, and if treatment is needed it will be many months before they are well again.
- Because this is a cause of an illness that, even though rare, is preventable, it is recommended that honey is not given to infants under 12 months old.

Children over 12 months and adults do not have the same problems if they eat honey with these spores in it.

Parents often have questions about what sort of foods are good for babies and what they are better off without. This topic comes from the questions parents have asked us about feeding their babies.

Babies need to be encouraged to try many different foods, so if your baby seems to mostly want only one food have a talk to your child health nurse or a dietitian to get some more ideas.

To find out **how and when** to start your baby on solids see the topic '*Foods for babies (solids) 1 -how and when to start solids*'.

## Foods that may cause choking

Do not give babies and young children (up to 4 or 5 years):

- Nuts such as peanuts or almonds (unless ground into a smooth paste)

- Other hard foods such as pieces of raw vegetables (eg carrot) or raw fruits (eg apple) unless they are soft like ripe banana.
- Snack foods, such as popcorn, corn chips, whole or even halved grapes, raisins or sultanas, seeds and hard lollies.
- Meat should be cut into small pieces and skins taken off sausages until the child can chew well.

## Foods that are not good for babies

### Salt

A baby's kidneys cannot cope with a lot of salt. A diet high in salt is a cause of high blood pressure in some adults.

- Do not add salt to the baby's food while cooking or after - and use less salt for the rest of the family too. You will soon get used to the different taste of foods without salt.



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For more information on this topic or any issues related to pregnancy, birth or babies, call the free 24 hour helpline:

**1800 882 436**



### Processed and 'fast' foods

Many of these foods contain too much salt, sugar, fat and preservatives - so they should not be given to babies and should be used only occasionally by the family. These include:

- fritz, sausages, salami, ham and bacon. Do not give uncooked meat products like metwurst or salami to babies or young children.
- pies, pasties, sausage rolls
- chicko rolls,
- bought pizzas (you could make your own pizzas with much less fat and salt)
- cakes and sweet biscuits
- dry biscuits with salty toppings.

### Spicy foods

These are not harmful but some babies prefer very plain tasting foods. If your family eats a lot of spicy or 'hot' foods, introduce them gradually to your baby.

### Vegetarian diets

- If your family does not eat meat, your baby or toddler can get good nourishment from other foods.
- Milk, cheese and eggs give first class animal protein.
- Dried beans and peas, seeds and ground nuts (eg peanuts) give vegetable protein.
- When vegetable protein is eaten with whole grain cereals you get a complete protein - which is as good as animal protein. It contains all the amino acids or building blocks our bodies need). Examples are:
  - soy beans + brown rice
  - wholemeal bread + peanut butter.
- Include plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables in the baby's diet.
- Vegetarian babies get iron from cereals (especially baby cereals), legumes (dried beans and peas) and green vegetables.

### Vegan diets

With vegan diets which do not have any animal foods (milk, cheese or eggs etc.) it is harder to meet all food needs.

- Vitamin B12 will be missing and it is essential for growth and development, especially of the nervous system. You need to take extra Vitamin B12 while you are pregnant and breast feeding and give it to your child. (Some soy bean foods have Vitamin B12 added).
- It can be hard for young children on a vegan diet to get enough calcium, iron and protein for healthy growth.

It is wise to check with a dietician so you can plan their meals to be sure they are getting the foods they need.

### Traditional diets

Various ethnic groups have traditional diets, which are usually balanced and healthy, as long as natural, fresh foods are used. Don't add too many highly refined western foods. Choose the foods you like to use from the ones suggested for babies and prepare them in your traditional way.

### Special diets

Special diets may be needed for a variety of problems.

- Make sure to get advice from a doctor, child health nurse or dietician before putting your child on a special diet.
- It is important that children get enough different types of food to meet their needs for growth and development.

### Baby's weight

We hear a lot about the problem of obesity in our society, so it is natural for parents to be concerned. Overweight children may become overweight adults, but the younger the child, the less likely this is. However if parents are very overweight, their children are more likely to have the same problem.

### So, what does this mean for babies?

- The first year of life is one of very rapid growth, and putting on a layer of fat is normal and healthy at this stage.
- Some babies do get very large, but as long as they have a healthy diet, their weight tends to settle down in the toddler years. They may not gain much weight at all between one and three, but grow a lot taller.
- It is important for babies and children to be able to choose how much they eat, so they can develop their own appetite controls. This will help them avoid weight problems later on.
  - If children are forced to finish all the food on their plate, they may well develop a habit of over-eating.

Ensure your child, and the whole family, are active. Getting plenty of exercise is really important for good health.

### Yellow vegetables and skin colour

- Babies who eat a lot of carrots or pumpkin can get yellow or orange skin from substances called carotenoids. These substances from the vegetables are chemicals related to Vitamin A, and are not toxic, and will not cause any harm.

- However a few babies who develop yellow or orange skin will have an underlying health problem, especially with the liver, rather than too much of these vegetables, so it is important to have your baby checked.

### **Honey and botulism - more information**

The spores (like seeds) of a bacterium called *Colstridium botulinum* can be present in honey.

Children over the age of one year, and adults can safely eat honey which contains these spores, and not develop any health problems. However if infants under 12 months eat honey which contains these spores, some babies will develop a serious health problem called botulism.

This is rare. Why this affects only babies under 12 months is not known. The toxin (poison) that these bacteria produce can cause paralysis, so that babies with botulism suddenly appear floppy, feed poorly, are constipated and have a weak cry. If not treated there can be a paralysis of respiratory muscles leading to death. Because it develops very fast, the baby may die suddenly, and be thought to have died from SIDS. Treatment of botulism is usually successful, but it will be needed for many weeks and may include being on a ventilator to support breathing. In adults, botulism is usually caused by eating poorly preserved food which has the toxin in it.

Botulism in babies is rare. Only one case was recorded in South Australia (population of just over 1.4 million people) in 2003, the only case since the beginning of 2000. However it is preventable. Therefore it is recommended that infants under 12 months are not fed honey.

### **References**

National Health Medical Research Council Nutritional Guidelines for Children and Adolescents 2003  
<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/dietsyn.htm>

\*\*Any products referred to in our health topics are usually well-known brands readily available in Australia. The brand names are given as examples only, and are not necessarily better or worse than other products on the market.

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