

Babies make many changes in their feeding abilities between 6-12 months of age.

Baby's readiness signs to move from breast/bottle to solids:

- Sits up without support and has good control of neck muscles
- Picks up food and tries to put it in mouth
- Holds food in mouth without pushing it out with tongue right away
- Shows interest in food when others are eating
- Opens mouth and leans body toward offered food
- Lets you know they do not want food by closing mouth, leaning back or turning head away



General Tips to Follow for All Babies:

- Offer food types and textures according to development and readiness skills
- Babies get enough to drink from breast milk or formula. Water or small amounts of unsweetened juice may be offered.
- Offer solids at least twice per day increasing to five times as they near 12 months
- Ensure your baby is well supported in a seated position
- Eat with your baby and include your baby at mealtimes
- Keep mealtimes relaxed and pleasant
- Respect your baby's feeding cues; babies will open their mouth when they are hungry and close their mouths, turn their head away or push food away when they are full
- Never force food into your baby's mouth or keep feeding after food is refused
- Encourage your baby to start finger feeding or holding the spoon
- Expect a mess and do not try to keep your baby clean during a meal
- New foods may need to be introduced several times on different days before they are accepted
- Remove distractions like toys and screens
- Wipe your baby's gums with a soft, damp cloth twice a day for good oral health
- **Watch for Allergic Reactions:** Introduce one new food at a time to ensure that your baby does not have an allergic reaction. Mild symptoms may include: flushed face, hives, itchy red rash on tongue, mouth or around the eyes. If your baby has a mild allergic reaction stop the food and call your baby's doctor. More severe symptoms of an allergic reaction may include: swelling of your baby's mouth, tongue and throat, hives that are spreading, difficulty breathing, difficulty swallowing or hoarse voice, pale or blue colour of your baby's face or lips. If you see any severe symptoms, call 911 immediately.

Foods to avoid under 12 months of age:

- *Unwanted sweeteners* including added sugar, artificial sweeteners and honey

- *Unwanted chemicals* including added salt, deli meats (e.g. ham, sausage, salami) and fish high in mercury (e.g. swordfish, tuna steak, orange roughy)
- *Sweetened drinks*: Avoid pop, sports drinks, and punches
- *Foods that may cause choking* including the following:
 - Raw vegetables and hard fruits like apples unless they are grated
 - Small, smooth pieces like peanuts and nuts, hard candy, ice cubes, gum or marshmallows
 - Dried fruit or seeds like raisins, pumpkin seeds, or sunflower seeds
 - Grapes and hot dogs unless cut up into bite size pieces or cut lengthwise
 - Popcorn
 - Stringy foods like celery or pineapple unless they are finely chopped
 - Peanut butter or other nut butters spread thickly or served on a spoon

Mixed Textures:

Many babies will refuse Stage 3 jarred baby foods because of the “surprise lumps”. Babies learn to eat purees with a sucking motion. When you add chunks to that puree, they suck the chunks back, along with the puree, causing them to gag or choke. Save mixed textures until after your baby can handle individual textures (usually between 12-18 months)



What to Do About Gagging?

Gagging may happen when your baby is learning to eat solids. Gagging occurs when food comes too close to the back of your baby's throat without them swallowing. It is normal and can help prevent choking on a food. If your baby gags, stay calm and reassuring. Ways to prevent gagging include:

- Feeding your baby foods that match their readiness level
- Slowing your pace and allowing time for your baby to see, smell, and touch the food before tasting
- Trying smaller bites
- Placing food at the side of the mouth (where the molars will be) to encourage chewing
- Avoiding force feeding or feeding when your baby is tired or upset
- Offering toys that are safe for chewing and mouthing during play time

Carefully monitor all new foods. Some coughing and an occasional gag is normal. If you are seeing this frequently, the texture you are giving may be too difficult. Discuss frequent gagging and other feeding difficulties with your baby's therapist or physician. First Aid Training for choking is recommended for all parents.

References: wechu.org, yourkidstable.com, caringforkids.cps.ca, butterflytherapy.com, aboutkidshealth.ca