



Feeding Your Premature Baby Step-by-Step

Feeding problems commonly occur when babies are given foods that they are not developmentally ready to eat. When to give certain foods can be especially confusing for a parent of a premature baby. Your baby was born at _____ weeks, or _____ weeks earlier than expected. He may need to follow a different schedule for introducing new foods based on his readiness and “corrected age.”

His corrected age (sometimes called adjusted age) takes into account the fact that he was born early. Using his corrected age and watching for signs that he is ready for the next feeding stage will make feeding your baby a lot easier — for you and your baby.

When your baby is:	His corrected age is:	When he does this...	He is ready to try these foods:
_____ to _____ months old 	0-3 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sucks and swallows liquids • Pushes tongue out when swallowing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breastmilk and/or infant formula
_____ to _____ months old 	4-6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sits with help • Supports and controls his head • Grabs things and puts them in his mouth • Takes food from a spoon without gagging, coughing, or choking • Removes food from a spoon with a sucking action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breastmilk and/or infant formula • Infant cereal • Single ingredient pureed fruits and vegetables by 5-6 months corrected age • Pureed baby food meats
_____ to _____ months old 	7-9 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sits without help • Holds and tips his bottle by 8 months corrected age • Drinks from a cup with lots of spilling • Moves tongue from side to side • Opens mouth when spoon comes near • Up and down chewing motion begins • Holds things with a whole hand grasp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breastmilk and/or Infant formula • Thicker, lumpier foods that tend to stick together like cooked mashed egg yolk, fork-mashed soft cooked table foods (beans, fruit, noodles, vegetables), cottage cheese • Zwieback toast or biter biscuits
_____ to _____ months old 	10-12 months old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drinks from a cup with less spilling • Uses thumb and finger to pick up things • Feeds hand to mouth • May begin to move jaw in a circle when chewing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breastmilk and/or infant formula • Diced fruits and vegetables, whole noodles, crackers, small pieces of tender, cooked meats, dry Cheerios®



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This pamphlet provides general guidelines for feeding your premature infant. If your doctor, dietitian, or feeding therapist has given you different instructions for feeding your baby, follow those.

Not all premature infants will develop at the same rate. In general, if your baby was born several weeks early, it may take him longer to go to the next feeding stage than if he was born just a few weeks early. Use this pamphlet to help you watch for signs that he is ready to move on to the next stage.

- ✓ When baby is ready to begin spoon-feeding, infant cereal is a good first choice because it can be mixed to a smooth consistency with breastmilk or formula and contains both iron and zinc. At first, offer one to two teaspoons of a thin mixture working up to 1/4 cup twice each day. Add less liquid over time, as baby gets better at eating. When introducing new foods, wait a few days before each new food is given to make sure baby doesn't have a bad reaction. Skin rash, wheezing, congestion, diarrhea and/or vomiting may be a sign of an allergic reaction.
- ✓ Juice is not recommended during the first year. Check with your doctor about giving juice when your baby is constipated.
- ✓ Gradually reduce the amount of formula or breastmilk your baby takes to no more than 24 ounces a day by 9 to 12 months corrected age. This will encourage him to eat more solid foods and reduce the chance that he will become anemic when changed to cow's milk.
- ✓ If your baby takes formula or stops breastfeeding, your baby's doctor may want your baby to stay on an iron-fortified formula past his first birthday, especially if your baby was born very early and is not eating a variety of foods by 1 year of age.
- ✗ If your baby takes a bottle, do not add cereal or other foods unless your doctor recommends it for medical reasons. This can become a habit that is hard to break. It is best to wait until your baby can eat from a spoon because using a spoon helps baby strengthen different muscles of the face and mouth, including the tongue. This helps to develop the muscles used for talking.
- ✗ Never give honey to your baby before he is 1 year corrected age. Although not harmful to children and adults, honey contains germs that can cause poisoning in young babies.

If your baby consistently gags, coughs, chokes, or refuses foods, your baby may have a true feeding problem. Talk with your doctor. If he finds nothing medically wrong, you may need the help of a feeding specialist. Ask to be referred to an Early Childhood Intervention program or call 1-800-628-5115.