

## FEEDING BABY SOLIDS

By Dr. Karen Prentice

Over the past 4-5 years the advice our practice has given on feeding babies solid foods has radically changed. Much of this is based on experience and experimenting with our own children as well as a wonderful book written by Gill Rapley and Tracey Murkett called *Baby-Led Weaning*. The premise of the book is to teach your baby to sit at the table with the family for meals and to only eat when they are actually hungry. It eliminates baby foods and spoon feeding your baby. Babies love to make their parents happy and by spoon feeding a baby they eat, the parent's smile and the babies end up eating whether they are hungry or not. This new method ensures that your baby will only eat when they are truly hungry. In addition, this method eliminates baby food, purees, rice cereal, and lets our babies eat fresh steamed vegetables and table foods with all the wonderful seasonings and spices, hopefully encouraging them to eat their vegetables for the rest of their lives.

This method is currently a well-recognized, healthy way to introduce solid foods to your baby, although I can honestly say that I incorporated this method with my children 20 years ago and they are both healthy eaters today. Here it is:

1. Once your baby can sit upright in a highchair, usually at 6 months old, have your baby sit with you for breakfast, lunch and dinner and serve them whatever your family is eating, as long as it is soft and small in size—about the size of your pinky.
2. Continue to bottle or breast feed your baby exactly as you have been. For breastfeeding moms, please continue to take your prenatal vitamins.
3. Do not feed your baby rice cereal, pureed foods, or baby foods.
4. Do offer your baby steamed vegetables, soft pieces of fruit, whole grain toast cut in strips, avocado pieces, scrambled eggs or whatever your family is eating that is soft and can be cut in "french fry" size pieces.
5. Do not feed your baby. Simply place small amounts of food on your babies' tray and let them feed themselves. It is ok if they make a mess and don't really eat. At first they will just play with their food and watch what you are doing. Never force them to eat or encourage them to eat. Your baby will get plenty of nutrition from formula or breast milk and introducing solids is just for fun. Eventually, your baby will try to jam everything in their mouths. They may gag and spit out the food, but do not be alarmed as this is all part of the learning process and doesn't mean that they do not like the food or that they are actually choking. Don't worry, your baby does not need to teeth to chew but will use their gums and saliva to soften the foods.
6. You do not have to introduce foods one at a time. It is ok to give your baby a large variety of foods. Studies have shown that we will see less food allergies if we introduce everything all at once starting at 6 months old and this includes eggs and nut butters.
7. Do not give your baby honey or cow's milk until your baby is 12 months old.
8. Avoid choking foods such as raw vegetables, nuts, popcorn, candy, hotdogs or grapes.

9. Never leave your baby unattended with solid foods and never leave them unattended in a high chair.

### **Make Your Baby a Healthy Eater for Life!**

Now is the time to teach your baby to eat healthy foods for life. If you feel that you do not eat healthy, consider improving your nutrition. Here are a few tips:

1. Try to eat 3-4 servings of vegetables per day—for your baby an example of a serving is 2 steamed green beans or 2 steamed baby carrots.
2. Try to eat 2-3 servings of fresh fruits per day—for a baby an example of a serving is 2 pinky size pieces of chopped melon.
3. Never, ever give your baby juice, Capri Sun, Kool Aid, Gatorade or soda. These drinks contain too much sugar and offer no nutritional value.
4. Avoid vegetable drinks as they contain too much sodium.
5. Feed your baby only whole grains such as brown rice, whole wheat pastas, quinoa, oatmeal, and whole grain breads. Whole grains offer far better nutrition than white rice, pastas or breads.
6. Offer only lean meats such as shredded, skinless chicken or turkey. Limit red meat to only lean cuts and only 1-2x per week.
7. Avoid processed foods and fried foods such as goldfish, chips, cookies and cakes, fries, fish sticks and chicken nuggets. Of course, birthday cake on their birthday is ok.