Introducing Solid Foods:  
Top 10 tips for Parents  

1. At around 6 months, infants should be offered a variety of foods so that their increasing nutritional needs can be met. Up until that time breast milk or formula should be enough.

2. Start with iron rich foods such a fortified baby rice cereal and red meat. Along with these iron rich foods, other foods can be introduced in any order.

3. The food texture will need to suit the ability of baby to chew and swallow. Pureeing food may not be necessary. Mashed, minced or finely chopped then lumpy may be a way to progress food texture during the 6 – 12 month period.

4. Increase the range and quantity of solid foods so that by 12 months the infant is having a variety of family foods. Keep in mind that infants may not like new foods at first and may need to be offered that food up to 10 days in a row for it to be accepted. There may be some foods the baby may never like.

5. To reduce the risk of choking, don’t give whole nuts (or similar hard foods), whole grapes or whole cherry tomatoes.

6. When preparing food there is no need to add sugar, honey or salt. Honey and sugar contribute to tooth decay. Honey should not be given to infants under 12 months old. It may cause botulism.

7. Breast milk can be given beyond 12 months. Formula should be given until baby is 12 months. Cooled boiled tap water can be also be given if baby is on formula. After 12 months there is no need to boil water. Cordial, juice, soft drink, tea or coffee should not be given (at all).

8. Don’t give cow’s milk as the main drink for infants under 12 months. Small amounts may be used in preparation of solid foods such as mashed potato, baby rice cereal etc.

9. Cow’s milk is an excellent source of protein, calcium and other nutrients. Full cream milk is recommended until 2 years of age. Between 2 and 5 years fat reduced milk can be given and after 5 years skim milk may be given. Unpasteurised milk should not be used.

10. In the first 12 months, soy milk (soy formula is OK) and other plant-based milks such as rice, oat, coconut or almond milk are not suitable alternatives to breast milk or formula. Calcium fortified soy drink or calcium-enriched rice and oat beverages can be used after 12 months. A full-fat variety should be used and other sources of protein and vitamin B12 are included in the diet. It is important that a doctor professional is consulted if wanting to use these milks.
What if there is a history of food allergies?

When introducing solid foods to your baby, include common allergy causing foods by 12 months of age. These foods include egg, peanut, cow’s milk (dairy), tree nuts, soy, sesame, wheat, fish, and other seafood. Recent studies show that delaying introduction of allergenic foods may increase the chance of developing a food allergy in babies.

Once introduced, continue to give these foods twice weekly (as part of a varied diet) as this will help maintain tolerance. Trying a food and then not giving it regularly may result in developing an allergy. Some babies may still develop a food allergy despite following this advice. If your baby has an allergic reaction, stop giving that food and seek medical advice.

To start, introduce small amount of well cooked egg or smooth peanut butter. It is wise to do this with daytime feeds rather than the evening. This will allow you to watch your baby and respond if they have an allergic reaction.

Mix a ¼ teaspoon, of hard-boiled egg or smooth peanut butter into your baby’s usual food (such as vegetable puree). If your baby is not having any allergic reactions, gradually increase the amount, for example ½ teaspoon the next time.

Even before feeding these potentially allergenic foods, you can rub a small amount of the food inside your baby’s lip as a starting point. If there is no allergic reaction after a few minutes, you can start giving small amounts of the food as described above. Don’t smear food on baby’s skin as this can increase the risk of allergies.

Rubbing creams that contain nut oils onto baby’s skin can sensitise infants to these nuts thus causing an allergy.

Current research shows that soy or goat’s milk formula does not reduce the chance of allergies developing.

Current research does not support the use of partially hydrolysed formulas (usually labelled ‘HA’ or Hypoallergenic) or extensively hydrolysed formulas to prevent eczema, food allergy, asthma or hay fever (allergic rhinitis) in babies or toddlers.

Regular cow’s milk, goat’s milk, soy milk, nut and cereal beverages such as oat milk and almond milk are not recommended for babies as their main source of milk before one year of age as they do not provide the same nutrition as breast milk or infant formula.

References:

- Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA)