Introducing Solid Foods:  
**Top 10 tips for Child Care Staff**

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. Parents should be informed to start with iron rich foods such as fortified baby rice cereal and red meat. Along with these iron rich foods, other foods can be introduced in any order. Many ECEC’s provide pureed fruit and vegetables as first foods. These are poor sources of iron and don’t help to increase the infants iron intake.

3. The food texture will need to suit 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 times consecutively 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 raw apples, pieces of meat (including chicken and fish), raw carrots, cooked peas (always mash), whole grapes or whole cherry tomatoes.

6. If 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.

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 (except soy formula) 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 or health professional is consulted if wanting to use these milks.
What if there is a history of food allergies in the child’s family?

When introducing solid foods to a baby with a family history of allergy, parents should be encouraged to 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. They should be trialled at home first and not in child care. Recent studies show that delaying introduction of allergenic foods may increase the chance of developing a food allergy in babies.

Once introduced and safe to consume, 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 the baby has an allergic reaction, stop giving that food and seek medical advice. Most centres are nut free, so parents will need to provide this at home.

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.

Myths concerning allergy

1. You can’t have an allergic reaction when you eat a food for the first time.

False! In one third of allergic reactions the food has never knowingly been eaten before. For an allergic reaction to happen, the body must be first sensitised to the food. This exposure can happen through the skin (particularly if creams containing nut oils are used on eczema). Intact food proteins can also pass through mother’s breastmilk which can potentially cause sensitisation to that food.

2. Allergic reactions get worse each time the food is eaten.

False! The severity of an allergic reaction is variable and doesn’t get worse each time. The severity of a reaction depends on other risk factors that are present at the time of the reaction. These factors include, how much of the food is eaten, how the food is cooked, unstable asthma or delay in treatment with adrenalin (EpiPen)

References:

- Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA)