



# Welcome Words for your Four Month Old

## Starting Solids: Now or Later?

While some parents are happy to wait until 6 months or later to introduce solids, others can't wait. As soon as they get the go-ahead from the doctor, they want to welcome their baby to the wonderful array of tastes waiting for him. They even may have heard that babies who begin solids start sleeping through the night, and what parent isn't ready for that?

Whatever your position, keep in mind that readiness for solid foods (which are actually pureed or strained) depends on your baby's timetable, not yours, the doctor's, or Grandma's. And there's no guarantee that eating a variety of foods will encourage sleep.

### Signs that he's ready for solids include:

- good head control and the ability to sit without slumping when propped up;
- the disappearance of the tongue thrust reflex, which causes babies to push objects out of their mouths. Place a tiny bit of infant rice cereal thinned with breast milk or formula in your baby's mouth from the tip of a small spoon or your finger. If the food comes right back out after several tries, the reflex is still present. Wait a few weeks before trying again.
- reaching for and showing interest in table foods.
- the ability to move his tongue back and forth, as well as up and down.
- the ability to draw the lower lip in so that food can be taken from a spoon.



If your baby shows these signs of readiness, it's still important to move slowly. Choose a time when he's alert and happy. Offer each new food alone, waiting at least three days before adding another. This schedule gives you time to notice if there is an allergic reaction, which may include wheezing, runny nose (though your baby doesn't have a cold), diarrhea, and a rough rash, around the mouth or anus. If your baby shows any of these symptoms, wait a week and then try the food again. If you see the same response, call his health care provider.

### Where to Begin

1. It's a good idea to begin with rice cereal, which is easy for your baby to digest. Mix with formula or breast milk and try a small amount on a baby spoon. Feeding is messy business, so be prepared with a damp washcloth and plenty of patience. Both of you may end up needing a change of clothing!
2. Remember that your baby's getting all he needs from breast milk or formula. If solids aren't a success, there's no reason to worry about his being undernourished.

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## Milestones

### By 4 months (16 weeks), you:

- laugh out loud; may cry if play is interrupted.
- follow an object about 6 inches above your face from one side to the other.
- may reach for a toy.
- lift your head up 90 degrees when on your stomach.
- may prefer one toy to others.

### I'm responding to your new abilities by:

- making sounds such as buzzing, humming, popping or clucking my tongue.
- playing peek-a-boo, which helps you understand that I'm still there, even if you can't see me.
- supporting you in a sitting position on my lap, or holding both arms and slowly pulling you up to sit.
- helping you creep on your tummy by placing my hands behind your feet, so you can push.
- putting a rolled towel under your chest when you're on your tummy so you can play with toys in front of you with your hands.

## Suggested Reading

[The First Twelve Months of Life: Your Baby's Growth Month by Month](#): The Princeton Center for Infancy and Early Childhood

[What To Expect the First Year](#) by Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi Murkoff and Sandee Hathaway

[Child of Mine: Feeding With Love and Good Sense](#) by Elynn Sakler

[Siblings Without Rivalry](#) by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish



## Where to Begin *continued*

3. Families with a strong history of food allergies should avoid the introduction of major food allergens (eggs, milk and milk products, wheat, soy, peanuts, tree nuts, fish and shellfish) until after the first year of life. Your child's health care provider can help you decide on their introduction
4. In families without a history of food allergies, plain unsweetened yogurt and cheese can be offered at 5-6 months. Introduce finely chopped meats between 7-9 months. Avoid honey during his first year; it can cause serious illness.
5. Never try to force your baby to eat. If he closes his mouth and turns his head away, that's the signal that he's had enough. The more relaxed you can be about these first meals, the better for both of you.

## On the Safe Side

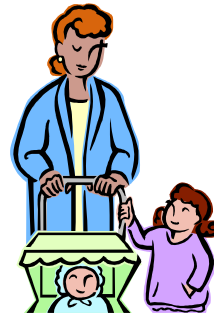
By the age of 4 months, your baby may surprise you by reaching and grabbing items he puts in his mouth and by the sudden ability to roll over.

### To be on the safe side:

- Never leave him alone where he could fall, or where he could roll into danger — against a wood stove or other source of heat, a brick hearth, or any sharp object. In his crib, remove any soft objects that could cause suffocation.
- Don't eat, drink or carry hot foods or drinks while holding him. One waved fist could result in a burn for both of you.
- For many months, your baby will be learning about the world through putting everything in his mouth. Pieces of hard food, a gummed piece of envelope or paper, or a small toy can cause choking. For information about a class in infant CPR, contact the local American Red Cross, 489-6541 or [www.centralnorthcarolina.redcross.org](http://www.centralnorthcarolina.redcross.org).
- Motor Vehicle Crashes are the greatest threat to your baby's safety. Be sure that your infant car seat is installed according to the manufacturer's instructions, and that it is positioned in the center of the back seat, the safest position in your car. Babies under 20 lbs. and one year should ride facing backwards. If your baby is approaching 20 lbs, it is recommended that you get an infant/toddler convertible car seat so your baby can ride rear-facing until after one year old.
- Don't take your eyes off your baby in the bath, even for a second.
- Avoid taking him into a pool or other water until he has good head control; otherwise his head may accidentally bob under the water. Experts also advise against submerging an infant's face. Although babies instinctively hold their breath under water, they still swallow, which can lead to water intoxication, a serious illness. Symptoms include restlessness, weakness, nausea, and convulsions, and may not show up for as long as eight hours.

Source: What to Expect the First Year, Eisenberg, et al.

## Making the Most of Siblings



A new baby makes a delightful and challenges entrance into your family. Adjusting to the new baby can be especially challenging for an older child. These tips from Nancy Samalin's book, Loving Each One Best, may be helpful:

- ◆ When you or your partner come in, hug your older child first. The baby won't mind being second.
- ◆ Let your older child help, with supervision of course. Even a toddler can pat the baby on the back to burp him, or hand you a diaper.
- ◆ Don't expect too much of older children, though they seem eager to help. They aren't "little parents" and need some of your undivided time as well.
- ◆ Encourage your child to draw pictures for the baby's room.
- ◆ Try to stick as close as possible to the rituals of the good old days before the baby arrived, especially bedtime.
- ◆ If your older child wants to be a baby again, indulge her without teasing. Most will soon tire of this game. If she's under 3 or 4 and wants to try nursing, it's OK to let her. Some children just want to hear that you'll let them try; nearly all lose interest after one taste of breast milk. If an older child is still envious of breastfeeding, make special room for her on a couch and read a story or play a simple board game while you nurse the baby.
- ◆ Ask your child what she thinks the baby wants, then praise her: "You seem to understand the baby better than anyone."
- ◆ Set aside time for just the two of you, even if that means leaving the baby with your partner or a sitter. Choose something that you'll both enjoy — a trip to the park or a special meal out.

Remember that adjusting to being a big brother or sister takes time. The more frequently you can "catch" your older child being helpful and independent, or loving and kind to the baby, the more of this behavior you'll see.