



# Developmental Readiness

Developmental readiness for solid foods is one of the most important times for infants. However, when is an infant ready for solid foods? This question is very important because of the significance of the associated health challenges of introducing solid foods to infants too early or too late. Find this handout and more information on the: [DPI's New CACFP Meal Pattern webpage](#).

## Infant Readiness Guidelines for Solid Foods

Typically, around six months of age infants are ready to eat solid foods. However, an infant's readiness depends on his or her rate of development, not age. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) provides the following guidelines to help determine when an infant is developmentally ready to accept solid foods:

- The infant is able to sit in a high chair, feeding seat, or infant seat with good head control;
- The infant opens his mouth when food comes his way. He may watch others eat, reach for food, and seem eager to be fed;
- The infant can move food from a spoon into his or her throat; and
- The infant has doubled his or her birth weight.



The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends breastfeeding as the sole source of nutrition for infants until 6 months of age, and that by 7 or 8 months of age, infants should be consuming solid foods from all food groups (vegetables, fruits, grains, protein foods, and dairy).



## Communicate with Parents

It is important to maintain constant communication with the infants' parent(s) or guardian(s) about when to introduce solid foods

For additional information on developmental readiness, refer to the following resources:

- [American Academy of Pediatrics' Infant Food and Feeding](#)
- [WIC Infant Developmental Readiness Chart](#)
- [Feeding Infants: A Guide for Use in Child Nutrition Programs](#)

## Risks of Introducing Solid Foods Too Early

- Higher risk of choking because the infant has not developed the necessary skills for eating solid foods.
- Infant may consume less breastmilk or iron-fortified formula and not get enough essential nutrients for proper growth and development.
- Increases the risk of weight gain during the early years and being overweight later in life.

### Q&A

*Does the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) require that infants start solid foods at a certain age?*

No, the decision to start solid foods is up to the infant's parents/guardians. There is no requirement that the infant receives solid foods by a certain age in order for the provider to claim the child's meals for reimbursement. However, once the infant is developmentally ready, and the child's parents/guardians request the child receive solid foods, programs are **required** to offer them to the infant.

### Pop Quiz:



#### True or false:

All infants are ready to start solid foods at 6 months of age.

*See page 2 for the answer.*



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## Parent Discussion Tips for Challenging Scenarios

As providers, you may encounter challenging scenarios surrounding parent/guardian feeding requests for infants in your care. Below are two scenarios with some talking points and helpful resources.

### Scenario 1 – Delay Introduction of Foods

Parents request that you feed their 10 month old only breast milk. When feeding their infant, he is showing signs of being ready for foods through his mouth patterns, hand and body skills, and feeding abilities. He is also reaching for food served to other infants. You would like to support the infant's readiness, but his parents are not on board with this.

### Scenario 2 – Early Introduction of Foods

Parents request that you feed their 3 month old solid foods but she is giving cues that she is not yet developmentally ready for starting foods. She isn't holding her head up and opening her mouth when moving food towards her mouth.

### Talking Points:

- Discuss the *Infant Readiness Guidelines for Solid Foods*, from page 1, to help parents understand their infant's physical development and nonverbal cues to recognize if and when their infant is ready for solid foods. For Scenario 2, also discuss the *Risks of Introducing Solid Foods Too Early*, from page 1.
- Encourage parents to consult with their infant's physician about the feeding plan for introducing foods.
- Maintain open communication with parents:
  - You provide daily information on their infant's progress, acceptance of and reactions to foods
  - Parents provide updates on their infant's feeding schedule, including frequency of feedings, portions, and foods that have been introduced at home

### Resources to help with conversations about introducing solid foods:

- AAP: [Starting Solid Foods](#)
- [USDA-CACFP Infant Meal Pattern Chart](#): Provides appropriate foods and serving sizes



### If parents insist you follow their requested feeding style after the above discussion occurs:

Respect and honor the parents' decision. Continue open communication about their infant's progress, feeding responses, and behavior. You may request the parent to provide a medical statement from their infant's physician to ensure the infant is receiving the nutrition they need.

*If the infant is in distress while in care and the parents are non-responsive to your concern, consult with your licensor (or certifier) on further action to take. If the distress is life threatening, contact emergency medical services.*

### Other Feeding Scenarios

#### Serving cow's milk before age 12 months:

- Highly discouraged by health care professionals because an infant cannot adequately digest regular cow's milk.
- Resource: [AAP reasons not to serve cow's milk before 12 months](#)
- Not allowed in the CACFP unless the cow's milk is required because of a disability. A written medical statement, signed by a physician or nurse practitioner, must be on file.

#### Adding Cereal to an infant's bottle:

- Not recommended by the AAP because it may increase the likelihood the infant will gag or inhale the mixture into their lungs and may lead to overfeeding the infant.
- Resource: [AAP reasons to not put cereal in infant's bottle](#)
- Not allowed in the CACFP unless serving cereal in a bottle is required because of a disability. A written medical statement, signed by a physician or nurse practitioner, must be on file.

### Pop Quiz:

Answer: False!



The answer is **false**. The infant may be ready to accept solid foods at six months of age but this should not be the deciding factor. An infant's readiness depends on his or her rate of development. Refer to the AAP guidelines to help determine when an infant is developmentally ready for solid foods.