

Introducing infants to solid foods, vegetables

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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Every year, thousands of babies are born at OSF HealthCare hospitals. At OSF Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria alone, **2,200** babies were born in 2022.

This means any day now, parents will be attempting to add solid foods to the breastmilk or formula their baby only eats now. This can be a scary idea for new parents.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends not introducing solid foods to your baby until after they're at least 4 months old, and there are signs to look for to see if they're developmentally ready.

Your child should be able to:

- Sit up alone or with support.
- Control their head and neck.
- Opens their mouth when food is offered.
- Swallow food rather than push it back out onto the chin.
- Bring objects to the mouth.
- Try and grasp small objects, such as toys or food.
- Transfer food from the front to the back of the tongue to swallow.

Anne Orzechowski, an OSF advanced practice registered nurse specializing in family medicine, has some tips to help parents make a smooth transition.

"The best way to introduce your infant to greens is to pick one vegetable. Then if you have an infant that is above 4 to 6 months, you can puree it to a consistency that is safe for them to get down. Just give it a try with their rice cereal and see how they do. Pick one at a time, and make sure they aren't allergic to it," Orzechowski says.

The American Academy of Pediatrics says most kids don't need to be given foods in a certain order. By the time your baby is 7 or 8 months old, they can eat from a variety of food groups. This could be infant cereals, meat or other proteins, fruits, vegetables, grains, yogurts and cheeses, and more.

Orzechowski recommends steaming vegetables to reduce the risk of choking.

"You could do carrot coins," Orzechowski says. "You can steam pretty much anything. As long as it's cut up into tiny pieces that they won't choke on."

Not sure what food group to introduce to your child first? Orzechowski has some suggestions.

"I think introducing veggies before you introduce fruits is helpful. It's exciting to them, they start to like it, they look forward to it. Then once you introduce a fruit, they're like 'wow!' she says.

Orzechowski says vegetables and fruits have plenty of health benefits for kids, like fiber. The fiber from fruits and vegetables will help keep your child regular and benefit their digestive tract.

The CDC has additional tips for preparing food for your children.

- Mix cereals and mashed cooked grains with breastmilk, formula or water to make it smooth and easy for your baby to swallow.
- Mash or puree vegetables, fruits and other foods until they are smooth.
- Hard fruits and vegetables, like apples and carrots, usually need to be cooked so they can be easily mashed or pureed.
- Remove all fat, skin and bones from poultry, meat and fish before cooking.
- Remove seeds and hard pits from fruit, and then cut the fruit into small pieces.
- Round foods like hot dogs, sausage and string cheese should be cut into short thin strips instead of round pieces that could get stuck in the airway. Grapes, cherries, berries and tomatoes should be cut into small pieces.