

eat early. eat often.

Help prevent food allergy in your baby

Feed your baby the foods that most commonly cause food allergy at around 6 months of age and continue to feed them to your baby. If your baby is high risk for developing food allergy, introduction can start earlier than 6 months when developmentally ready, but not before 4 months.

The most common causes of food allergy in babies are cow's milk, egg, peanut, tree nuts, sesame, wheat, soy, and fish.

To help stop food allergy from developing, the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology and the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) recommend that these common food allergens are fed early to babies, when developmentally ready for solid foods.

High-risk babies have eczema or pre-existing food allergy, or a parent/sibling with eczema, food allergy, asthma or hay fever.

It's not recommended to test for food allergy before introducing allergenic foods. These foods should be introduced at home. If you're unsure, talk to your doctor about introducing them in their office.

This guidance will not stop all babies from developing food allergy, but it has been shown to drop the rates of food allergy.



Once your baby has eaten the food, and if there is no allergic reaction, it's very important to keep feeding that food to your baby at least once a week to help prevent the development of a food allergy.



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How to feed your baby early and keep foods in the diet

Your baby must be developmentally ready for solid foods.

They should be able to sit up well without support, in addition to showing other signs of readiness. Visit caringforkids.cps.ca for more information.



Give your baby allergenic foods for the first time at home.

Make sure it is a time when they will be awake for two hours afterwards in case allergy symptoms develop.



Offer different textures of food (puree, lumpy puree, minced) and do not give whole nuts or large pieces of food to ensure your baby isn't at risk of choking. Ensure peanut/nut butters are not too thick and can be easily swallowed.



Feed your baby one food at a time to see how they respond.

Once individual foods have been successfully introduced, then mixtures of those foods can be offered (e.g., mixed tree nut butter, whole wheat bread with eggs or peanut butter).



Introduce small amounts and go slowly. Offer your baby a small amount on the tip of a spoon. If no symptoms develop, continue to give the rest of the food at your baby's usual pace of eating. You can introduce the food in one sitting, or gradually over 2-3 days.



Once your baby has eaten an allergenic food without having a reaction, **it's very important to keep feeding it regularly** (at least once/week). Giving it just once or only sometimes could increase the chance of an allergy developing.



CPS recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. **For breastfed babies, avoid occasionally giving cow's milk formula, as it can increase the risk of cow's milk allergy. This also means supplementing with cow's milk formula in the first few days of life should be avoided.** If it has been introduced to your baby, Canadian allergists recommend continuing to give it daily (e.g., 2 teaspoons up to 1 bottle per day) to prevent milk allergy from developing, while maintaining daily breastfeeding. Studies show this does not impact breastfeeding duration or milk supply. Continue doing this until other milk products are introduced around 6 months.

Do not place food on the baby's skin. When food comes in contact with the skin, it may cause irritation/redness that can be mistaken for an allergic reaction.



If **certain allergens** are not a part of your family's normal diet, it is not necessary to feed them early – like crustaceans (e.g., crab, lobster), molluscs (e.g., clams, scallops), and fish.



Feeding allergenic foods for the first time in most babies is safe. It rarely causes a severe allergic reaction. If a food allergy is suspected, stop offering that food and speak to the doctor right away. Ask your doctor to refer you to an allergist as soon as possible to explore early oral immunotherapy, which may prevent your baby from developing lifelong food allergy. Continue introducing other allergenic foods without delay. If there are severe allergy symptoms, seek immediate medical attention/call 911.

Recipes

Regular grocery foods are all you need, you don't need special products like mixes or powders. The foods can be offered alone or added to an already tolerated baby food (e.g., cereal, pureed fruit).

Peanut

Variations can be made for tree nuts and sesame

Ingredients

- Smooth peanut butter or peanut powder



Directions

1. Take 2 tsp and add 2-3 tsp of hot water.
2. Stir until dissolved and well blended.
3. Allow to cool.



Whole peanuts are a choking hazard and should not be given to children under four.

Tips

Another option is a peanut puff product (e.g., Bamba), which can be softened for younger babies.

Use a similar type of recipe for tree nuts using nut butters, and sesame using tahini which is a condiment made from sesame.

Wheat

Ingredients

- Wheat-based foods like hot cereal, porridge, couscous, or pasta



Directions

For hot cereal, mix in liquid as directed on package.

Tips

Choose a cereal that does not contain skim milk powder, unless milk/dairy (e.g., yogurt, cheese, cow's milk formula), is already in the diet.

Egg, soy, fish, and other solids

Ingredients

- Whole egg (white and yolk)
- Soy (e.g., tofu), fish, other solids



Directions

Fully cook using method of choice (e.g., boiled, baked, scrambled) and adjust texture as needed (e.g., pureed, minced).



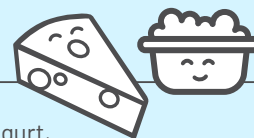
Tips

Be sure to cook the food well to reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

Cow's milk

Options

Offer solid foods that have cow's milk as the main ingredient: full-fat plain yogurt, grated cheese, or cottage cheese.



Tips

Cow's milk should not be introduced as a drink before 9-12 months. However, if a cow's milk-based formula has been introduced, feed it daily to help prevent milk allergy from developing, while maintaining daily breastfeeding.

Watch for signs of an allergic reaction

🕒 Allergy symptoms usually develop within minutes of eating a food but can occur up to 2 hours after ingestion.

Symptoms can be **mild**:

- 👶 A few hives
- 👶 Redness around the mouth – this may be due to skin irritation rather than allergy

Do not stop introducing the food if these are the only symptoms.

More **severe** symptoms can include:

- 👶 Swelling of the lips, eyes, or face
- 👶 Vomiting
- 👶 Hives all over the body
- 👶 Breathing symptoms such as repetitive cough, wheeze, or any difficulty breathing
- 👶 A change in skin colour (pale, blue)
- 👶 Sudden tiredness/lethargy/seeming limp

There can also be behavioural changes such as irritability, inconsolable crying or clinging to a caregiver.

What to do if your baby has a **severe** allergic reaction:

- ✅ Call 911/EMS. If a junior dose of epinephrine is on hand, administer it if your baby is having an anaphylactic reaction.
- ✅ Ask your doctor to refer you to an allergist right away to explore early oral immunotherapy.
- ✅ Continue introducing other allergenic foods without delay.



More information

Learn more about introducing allergens at foodallergycanada.ca/earlyintro.

For general feeding information for the first year, visit caringforkids.cps.ca.

Find an allergist at csaci.ca.