Your baby is growing and changing and is eager to move around and explore. When you let your baby see, touch, smell, and listen to new things, it helps him learn.

**FEEDING YOUR FOUR-MONTH-OLD**

Your baby is growing and changing, and these changes tell you that she’s ready to begin some gradual changes in her diet. There are no hard and fast rules about when to add solid foods to a baby’s diet at this time—it is best to let your baby take the lead.

It is better for your baby to wait to start solid foods until he is ready for them.

It will also be easier on you if you wait until your baby shows the following signs of readiness:

- Your baby can sit up when he’s supported.
- Your baby can turn his head toward or away from food to show you whether he is hungry.
- Your baby can control his head and chest well enough to move forward when he is hungry, and backward when he is full.
- Your baby puts things in his mouth and chews on them.

At the age of four months, your baby may be moving beyond just sucking abilities and beginning a swallowing pattern. This will help him move food to the back of the tongue and swallow without choking. So now, or very soon, is the right time to gradually introduce first solid foods, like infant rice cereal, to your baby’s diet!

Many pediatricians are recommending waiting until your baby is closer to six months to introduce solid foods for a variety of reasons, so it is important to discuss this with your baby’s doctor.

To start solid foods, begin with infant cereal mixed with breast milk or formula. Try plain, dry infant cereals—rice first, then oatmeal, and then barley.

- Pour 2–3 Tablespoons of breast milk or formula into a small bowl. Stir in about 1 Tablespoon of infant cereal.
- Set the baby on your lap or in an infant seat or high chair for feeding.
- Use a small spoon to feed the baby.
- Never force your baby to eat more than he or she wants. A couple of teaspoons are enough for the first several feedings.
- Introduce one new food at a time.
Why is rice cereal, when added to your baby’s diet between four and six months old, a good first solid food? There are several reasons. Infant cereals are iron-fortified, and babies need iron added to their diet somewhere between four and six months of age. Your full-term baby had enough iron stored when he was born to last until this time. But soon he will need food sources of iron to prevent anemia, especially if he is breast-fed and not receiving iron-fortified formula.

Another reason cereal is ideal for a first food is you can control the texture and thickness. Right now, your baby will best tolerate a smooth, semi-liquid texture. Later, when she is older and has mastered swallowing, she will like a thicker, lumpier texture. Mix the cereal with breast milk or formula—this gives your baby good sources of protein, carbohydrate, and necessary fat.

Rice cereal is often chosen for a baby’s first food because it is least likely to cause an allergic reaction. As you introduce solid foods into your baby’s feeding pattern, introduce them one at a time and watch how your baby tolerates the new food. More on introducing foods to baby next month!

Some parents think about starting solid foods before four months of age because they hope it will help their baby sleep through the night. However, most babies don’t get to the point where they can sleep six or seven hours at a time until after they are four months old. No worries—a night of longer sleep will come—eventually!

Breastfeedings and bottle-feedings are still the main source of nutrition for your baby, and, for right now, solid foods are adding only a small amount of calories and nutrients to his overall diet. Continuing those familiar bottle or breast feedings will provide the nutrients needed for proper growth as your baby ventures into the new world of solid food.

All children grow, learn, and develop at different rates. The information in this brochure is considered typical for children of this age. If you do all you can to help children grow and develop now, they will have the best chance to do well in school and in life.

References: