Developmental Readiness and Parent Provided Infant Food

Developmental readiness for solid foods is an important time for infants, parents and guardians. But when is an infant ready for solid foods?

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), introducing solid foods to infants before they are ready increases an infant’s risk of weight gain during the early years and of being overweight later in life. Also, when infants are not physically ready to accept solid foods, they are at a higher risk of choking because they have not developed the necessary skills for eating solid foods. Another major challenge of serving solid foods too early is that infants may consume less breastmilk or iron-fortified formula and not get enough essential nutrients for proper growth and development. Therefore, it is important to introduce solid foods to infants around six months of age when they are developmentally ready to accept them.

There is no one direct signal to determine when an infant is developmentally ready to accept solid foods. An infant’s readiness depends on his or her rate of development. The 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 or her mouth when food comes his or her way. He or she 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 weight.

As an early childhood professional working in a Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) setting, it is important to maintain communication with infants’ parents or guardians about when and what solid foods should be served while the infant is in care.

Parent Provided Infant Food

Infants enrolled in care must be offered a meal that complies with the CACFP infant meal pattern requirements. Parents or guardians may choose to provide one of the meal components in the CACFP meal pattern, as long as this complies with local health codes. A parent or guardian may choose to supply expressed breastmilk, a creditable infant formula or a mother may breastfeed her infant on-site and the meal will be reimbursable even when the infant is only consuming breastmilk or infant formula.

When an infant is developmentally ready for solid foods and the parent or guardian chooses to supply expressed breastmilk or a creditable infant formula or breastfeed on-site, then the center must provide all the other required meal components for the meal to be reimbursable. Alternatively, a parent or guardian may choose to provide a solid food component when the infant is developmentally ready to consume solid foods. In this situation, the center must supply all the other required meal components, including iron-fortified infant formula.
Developmental Readiness and Responsive Feeding Resources:

- American Academy of Pediatrics’ Infant Food and Feeding
- Infant Developmental Skills and Hunger and Satiety Cues by WIC Learning Online
- Child Feeding Ages and Stages by Ellyn Satter
- WIC Works Resource System
- Paced Bottle-Feeding by The Milk Mob

Brighton eLearning Infant Meal Pattern Training:

A CACFP Infant Meal Pattern Guide 2019 eLearning Module (30 minutes)

- A CACFP Infant Meal Pattern Guide is an interactive and fun eLearning module about the Infant Meal Pattern. The CACFP Meal Service Training Grant (MSTG), United States Department of Agriculture, provides the funding for this online training course. Consequently, due to requirements of the MSTG, to view this fun, eLearning module, all participants will create a login and password to access this training.

Four learning objectives from this module are:

- Identify the food components that make up a creditable CACFP meal for an infant
- Recognize the meal patterns used for infants in the CACFP
- Understand how serving sizes work when serving infants
- Recognize creditable and non-creditable infant foods

USDA Infant Feeding Resources:

- Print Materials:
  - CACFP 02-2018 Feeding Infants and Meal Pattern Requirements in the Child and Adult Care Food Program; Questions and Answers
  - Feeding Infants in the Child and Adult Care Food Program
  - Is Your Baby Ready for Solid Foods?

- Videos:
  - CACFP Halftime: Feeding Infants: 0 to 5 Months (30 minutes)
  - CACFP Halftime: Feeding Infants Starting with Solids (30 minutes)
  - CACFP Halftime: How to Support Breastfeeding in the CACFP (30 minutes)