

FIRST FOODS FOR REFLUX BABIES

Starting solids can be a fun and exciting time as well as an opportunity to bond with your baby and enjoy watching them experience and explore the world around them!

That said, if your baby has reflux or allergies/intolerances, starting solids may seem overwhelming and anxiety provoking. Although solid foods may help some symptoms for some children, for others they may have the potential to make things worse.

While every baby is different, and different foods may work better for some over others, here we aim to give you some general guidelines that will hopefully answer your questions and remove some of the anxiety you may be feeling about this process.

Remember! With solids and reflux it is best to start simple and slow. Especially with reflux babies. We want to make sure that we are identifying any foods that are possible “trigger” foods; an easy way to do this is by initially offering single ingredient foods (which is also important from an allergy perspective)

CEREAL

We will first start with baby cereal. Baby cereal can be an important part of your little one's diet, since many varieties are fortified with essential nutrients

Typically we would recommend oatmeal over rice. Rice cereal isn't necessarily bad for babies, but it can contain higher levels of arsenic, which can be dangerous if your baby eats too much. It also has the tendency to increase gas and constipation, both of which can worsen reflux.

Fortified baby cereal is an excellent source of iron, which babies need starting at around 6 months. This is especially important if your baby is breastfed, since breast milk doesn't contain very much iron. Oatmeal is a good place to start with as it is a single grain and is generally well tolerated.

When introducing oatmeal to your baby, you will want to start with more of a "soupy/runny" mixture and work up to a more pureed/oatmeal consistency. Mix 1 tablespoon of a single-grain, iron-fortified baby cereal with 4 tablespoons of breast milk or formula. Don't serve it from a bottle. Instead, help your baby sit upright and offer the cereal with a small spoon.



As your baby adjusts to spoon feeding, try letting them have a go themselves! This can be a messy process (especially in the early days) but it also helps your baby start to learn important new skills

CEREAL

Initially, offer cereal in the morning and then follow with a bottle. Look for signs of acceptance (making eye contact, opening their mouth when the spoon is presented) before putting the spoon in your baby's mouth. Remember that these first meals are more about the experience than the calories and that they do not have to eat all of the cereal- though it's fine if they do! Start small and work your way up. Additionally, as they begin getting the hang of swallowing runny cereal, begin mixing less liquid and increasing the serving size.

Once this has been mastered, you can offer a multi grain cereal, wheat, barley, etc.

Is Rice Cereal Safe?

Rice is the top dietary source of inorganic arsenic, as it's a staple in people's diets all around the globe and because rice plants tend to absorb more arsenic than others. Arsenic is naturally present in water, soil, and air, but processes such as mining, manufacturing, and pesticide use have increased the level of inorganic arsenic in the environment. Inorganic arsenic is more toxic than organic arsenic.

Babies typically eat much more rice in relation to their weight than adults do, since rice cereal is often a big part of babies' diets when they first start eating solid foods.

While research shows that most rice cereal brands contain less arsenic than the federally recommended maximum, experts still say it's best to avoid relying on rice cereal as a main source of iron and other nutrients. Instead, give your baby cereal made from different kinds of grains, like oat, barley, whole wheat, and multigrain, since those contain less arsenic. If you do give your baby rice cereal, make sure it's part of a varied diet.



VEGETABLES

The next step is single-ingredient vegetables. It is usually recommended to introduce vegetables before fruits, as offering fruits first may lead to a preference for their sweet taste and a reluctance to try veggies.

When introducing veggies, choose a time that is separate to when you are offering cereal, for instance at lunch or dinner. . Offer these first and then follow up with a bottle/breastfeeding. From both an allergy and a reflux perspective, you will want to offer the SAME single ingredient veggie for 3-5 days before marking it “safe” and moving onto the next. If a reaction is observed (either allergy or reflux wise), you will mark that veggie as “not safe.” If the reaction was a worsening of reflux, you can try again at a later date. If your baby shows signs of an allergic reaction consult with your pediatrician or allergist on what to do going forward with that particular food.

If a reflux reaction does occur, you may find that a mild, aluminium free antacid such as CVS brand Cherry Supreme helps to calm symptoms. Discontinue the food and let the flare pass before trialling another new food.

Signs of a food allergy include
hives, itchy skin rashes,
swelling, nausea, vomiting,
diarrhea, wheezing/trouble
breathing and pale skin



VEGETABLES

Some veggies that have been known to cause reactions are carrots and corn. This does not mean you should avoid them entirely, because every baby is different and it is important that they experience lots of different tastes and textures. What might be helpful is waiting to introduce these until your baby already has some 'safe' foods under their belt. You'll also typically want to avoid cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower and brussel sprouts in the early days as they can lead to excess gas and discomfort.

Examples of single veggies include sweet potatoes, regular potatoes, pumpkin, green beans, peas, carrots, corn, avocado, butternut squash, zucchini and yellow squash. Once you have trialed through all of the single ingredient veggies, and know which ones are "safe" and which ones are "triggers" you can then begin giving combination veggies.



FRUITS

Now, you can move to offering single ingredient fruits, introducing them in the same way you did vegetables. Stick with the same single ingredient fruit for 3-5 days, observe for a reaction and then mark it “safe” or “not safe”. If possible, offer them at a different time than when you are offering vegetables. For instance, you could offer fruits in the morning with cereal, or at lunch with vegetables for dinner (or vice versa).

Acidic fruits do tend to cause reflux babies the most trouble, so you may want to avoid them until they are a little older and towards the end of their reflux journey. Some of the most acidic fruits are oranges, grapefruit and pineapples.

Examples of single fruits include bananas, apples, pears, mangos, peaches, blueberries, strawberries, blackberries, grapes, prunes. Like vegetables, once you have trialed all single ingredient fruits, you can then move on to combination fruits and combination foods that many of the baby food brands offer.



STORE BOUGHT OR HOME MADE?

When it comes to introducing purees in particular, some families may choose to make their own at home while others may choose to purchase it pre-made (or a combination of both). The right choice is the one that works best for your family.

One thing to keep in mind when purchasing pre-made options is to check ingredient labels carefully. In the early days especially it is best to avoid ascorbic acid, lemon juice concentrate, and citric acid as these can flare reflux even if the food itself is otherwise well tolerated.. They are added to some pre-made baby foods to preserve them (for instance, to prevent bananas from turning brown).

Over the years, Gerber and Beechnut are two brands that have typically done a good job of making most of their prepared baby foods with just the food and water. It is more common for the pouches to contain ascorbic acid or citric acid rather than jarred or plastic tub baby food.

As your little one gets bigger and further along in their reflux journey, don't be afraid to try the baby food pouches or some of the baby food that does contain ascorbic acid, lemon juice concentrate, or citric acid. Many do really well once they are a bit older and tolerate these ingredients well. We just don't recommend that you use them in the beginning, particularly if your baby is still struggling to get their reflux symptoms under control.

