

Complementary Foods: The Importance of Developmental Readiness

One of the most important events during a baby's first year is the introduction of complementary foods. Often called baby food or solid food, complementary foods offers additional nutrients when breastmilk and/or iron-fortified formula is no longer enough for healthy growth and development. As a child care provider, parents may ask you questions about starting and serving complementary foods. Understanding this, it's important to know the basics of developmental readiness and how it relates to starting complementary foods.

Developmental readiness and complementary foods go hand and hand. Infants are generally ready for complementary foods between the ages of 4-6 months. When infants are fed too early, they can be at risk of choking, consuming more calories than needed, or developing food allergies and aversions. Feeding too early can also cause infants to consume too little breastmilk or infant formula, which can negatively impact their healthy growth and development.

On the contrary, it's important not to wait too late to introduce complementary foods. Eating these foods not only provide essential nutrients, but also promote fine motor skills. When infants are introduced to complementary foods too late, they can experience delayed speech development, may reject complementary foods, and consume inadequate amounts of essential nutrients for healthy growth and development.



The key to knowing when infants are developmentally ready can be found by watching behaviors for signs. According to *Infant Nutrition and Feeding: A Guide for Use in the WIC and CSF Programs*, infants will show the following signs:

- Sit up without any support or assistance;
- Hold head steady and straight;
- When food is presented, open mouth, keeping tongue low and flat;
- Close lips over the spoon, scraping food off the spoon as it's removed from mouth; and
- Keep the food in mouth, followed by swallowing it, rather than pushing it back out of the mouth.

When working with parents, remember an infant's weight and/or age does not always determine an infant's ability or readiness to eat complementary food.

For more information on complementary foods, checkout the *Infant Nutrition and Feeding: A Guide for Use in the WIC and CSF Programs* at <http://wicworks.nal.usda.gov/infants/infant-feeding-guide>

Fruit of the Month

It's fruit time! The fruit of the month is the grapefruit. People around the world enjoy grapefruits because of the sour, yet sweet taste, and for the nutritional benefits. Grapefruits are great sources of vitamin C and vitamin A. In addition, they are fat free, sodium free, and cholesterol free.

The United States is ranked number one for producing the most grapefruits. Very similar to grapes, grapefruit grow in clusters on trees. The most common grapefruits are white, pink/red, and star ruby/trio red. Introduce grapefruits to young children by reading books, taste testing, and inviting a local farmer to talk about how grapefruits are grown.



Nutrition Fact of the Month

Did you know overeating is one of the key sources for the obesity epidemic in the United States. On average, people eat 31% more today, than 40 years ago. Oversized servings and overeating can lead to type-2 diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension. A great way to reduce the chances of serving young children oversized portion is by using child-size plates. The average plate is 9 inches. Select smaller plates, such as 7.25 inch plates for children.



Nutrition Tip of the Month

Do you incorporate colorful plates and eating utensils for mealtimes? This is a great way to make mealtimes fun times for young children. In addition, using colorful plates, bowls, cups, and eating utensils is a conversation starter for family style dining and a great way to introduce children to colors.

Sources

- United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. (2009). *Infant nutrition and feeding*. Retrieved from <http://wicworks.nal.usda.gov/infants/infant-feeding-guide>
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CACFP Rock Star of the Month

The CACFP Rock Star of the Month is Ms. Lisa Barnes. Ms. Barnes is a director of a non-profit organization where she serves as a community collaborator for her local housing redevelopment and housing authority's youth afterschool program. She provides healthy meals to four public housing sites feeding in excess of two-hundred children on a daily basis. In addition to serving healthy meals, Ms. Barnes and her team introduce a variety of educational activities to the children in the program. Due to Ms. Barnes' efforts, many of the children have grown to love fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Congratulations, Ms. Barnes. You are indeed a CACFP Rock Star!