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Transitioning Your Baby to Table Food

There are a number of signals that tell us your child is ready change to table food as his/her main source of nutrition. The baby may now chew and swallow in appropriate sequence to avoid choking. He/she may now pick things up with thumb and finger (pincer grasp) and guide them successfully to the mouth. As we progress with a table food diet the goal will be to give balanced nutrition with food representative of all food groups. Breakfast might offer foods such as pancakes, waffles, toast, fruit, eggs* and cereals. Lunch could include macaroni, cheese*, peanut butter*, fruits, lunchmeats, yogurt*, or pizza. And dinner could give soft meats like turkey, chicken, fish*, soft vegetables, potatoes or pasta. As your baby develops these skills, move away from jarred pureed foods and give all table food allowing him/her the independence of feeding on his/her own, reserving parental participation to spoon food for now. It's messy, but fun!

There are, generally, no restrictions for foods that are considered highly allergenic or spice. This would be a good time to challenge with foods like eggs, tomatoes and berries. The only mandatory restrictions are 1) Food the size of the airway that may obstruct it e.g. whole grapes, hotdogs. 2) Food that might break up into small hard pieces and be aspirated into the airway and lung e.g. peanuts, popcorn, some raw vegetables. 3) Food requiring molars to chew before swallowing in the absence of those teeth e.g. steak, raisins. And, of course no honey until the first birthday.

When the diet has grown to include foods representative of a balanced diet then your baby may now become completely dependent on this balanced diet for nutrition. There should be no need for ongoing dependence on breast milk or formula and we may move towards discontinuance. Whole cow's milk (soy or rice milk for very allergic families) may be offered in a cup at each meal. Formula should be reduced to 4 oz bottles or breastfeedings given just four times per day. This is best given at nurturing times (upon arising in the morning, nap1, nap 2 and bedtime), avoiding offering breast or bottle as a source of security during fussy or fearful times. Remember YOU are your baby's source of security not the bottle or breast. Water should be offered in a cup, liberally, throughout the day and juice should be avoided. Finally, for bottle fed babies once the volume has been reduced and the diet is balanced the formula may change to cow's milk as well. The more independent your baby becomes with feeding the less likely he/she will become a finicky toddler.

