

Starting solid foods for premature babies

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

Over the next 2 years, your baby will learn to eat a variety of new foods in addition to breast milk or formula.

Starting new foods can be a different experience for babies born prematurely for 2 reasons:

- stage of development
- time spent in the neonatal intensive care unit



Use corrected age when introducing foods

Stage of development in premature babies is not based on their birthdate. Instead, their stage of development is based on their corrected age which takes into account a gestational period of 40 weeks. Your baby's corrected age is the age your baby would be if they were born on their due date.

How to calculate corrected age

Actual age – weeks premature = corrected age
(in weeks) minus (40 - weeks at birth)

For example, if your baby was born at 35 weeks and is now 46 weeks old, your baby's corrected age is: 46 weeks – 5 weeks = 41 weeks

Your baby might show signs they are ready to start eating solid foods at around 6 months corrected age.

Signs baby might be ready for solid food:

- can sit and hold their head up
- can watch and open their mouth for the spoon
- doesn't push food out of their mouth with their tongue

Use these as signs to start solid food, not exact date of 6 months corrected age.

If baby is slow to accept new foods

Sometimes premature babies resist eating new types of food because they have had bad experiences in the hospital with tubes or procedures around their mouths. Because of this, your baby may be slow to accept new foods. Make sure your baby continues to grow and gain weight.

When to get help

- If your baby is not easily accepting some solid foods (like thin rice cereal) by 7 months corrected age.
- If you are concerned about your baby's feeding progress or weight.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- The Feeding Team
604-585-5666 extension 778709
Surrey Memorial Hospital 13750 – 96th Avenue
Surrey, BC V3V 1Z2 Fax: 604-585-5568

Where to get more information

For more information about feeding:

- 📞 Go to: healthlinkbc.ca
Select 'Pregnancy and Parenting' tab
See these titles:
 - Parenting Babies 0-12 Months
 - Baby's Best Chance
 - Toddlers First Steps
- 📞 Go to: fraserhealth.ca
Under 'Health Topics'
select 'Pregnancy and Baby'
- 📞 Call your doctor.
- 📞 Call the Feeding Team.
- 📞 Call 8-1-1 to speak to a registered dietitian.