Introducing Solids to Infants in the Child Nutrition Programs

According to the Academy of American Pediatrics (AAP), 6 to 8 months of age is referred to as a critical window for introducing solid foods to infants. In addition, by 7 to 8 months of age, infants can be consuming solid foods from all food groups (vegetables, fruits, grains, protein foods, and dairy). All Child Nutrition Program (CNP) Operators feeding infants should recognize the signs of developmental readiness, communicate with parents/guardians about the introduction of solids, and be aware of the unique feeding habits of infants.

Tip!

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Infant Meal Pattern (PDF), http://bit.ly/2OOczN5, lists solid food quantities as a range starting with 0 to allow for the introduction of solid foods when the infant is ready to accept them. For example, a 6-month-old infant may be developmentally ready for 0, 1, or 2 tablespoons of pureed vegetable.

Developmental Readiness Signs

There is no single, direct sign to determine when an infant is developmentally ready to accept solid foods. An infant’s readiness depends on his or her rate of development, and infants develop at different rates. Some infants may be ready to consume solid foods before 6 months of age, and others may be ready after 6 months of age.

Below are signs that an infant may be 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.
- The infant has doubled his or her birth weight and weighs about 13 pounds or more.

Conversations with Parents or Guardians About Starting Solids

CNP Operators are strongly encouraged to start conversations early with the infant’s parents to determine when and what types of solid food to serve and request that parents provide this information in writing to the CNP Operator. It is important to always respect the parent’s decision; however, there may be times when you notice that an infant is (or is not) displaying developmental readiness signs to start eating solids but the parent disagrees. Below are some ideas on how to tackle those situations!

- Educate the parent on the signs of developmental readiness and express whether their infant is (or is not) showing some of these signs.
- Provide the parent with resources such as the USDA Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Infant Developmental Skills job aid (PDF): http://bit.ly/2zr6kcL.
- For developmentally ready infants, explain the benefits of adding solids to an infant’s diet, such as introducing new flavors and textures to the infant’s diet.
- Recommend that the parent speak with the infant’s pediatrician about the appropriate time to introduce solid foods.
Tip! If a parent does not want their developmentally ready infant to eat solids, the CNP Operator can still claim the meal or snack, provided that the minimum required amount of breastmilk or formula is offered.

Infant Eating Habits

It is normal for infants to refuse new foods and change the quantity of food consumed from feeding to feeding or day to day. Infants may want to eat less food when teething or not feeling well and more food on days when they have a good appetite. Additionally, the AAP states that it can take over ten tastes of a food before the infant accepts it.

Tip! Meals and snacks are reimbursable even if the infant refuses the offered food.

Solid foods are introduced gradually, which means that it may be appropriate to offer the solid food only once per day and then gradually increase the number of feedings per day. It is important to remember that infants develop at different rates. Not all infants will be eating solids at 6 months of age, nor will all infants be eating solid foods from each food group by 7 or 8 months of age. If a parent requests that the CNP Operator does not offer his or her infant one or more of the components in the meal pattern for any reason, the meals and snacks are still reimbursable as long as the CNP Operator serves the infant the required amount of breastmilk or iron-fortified infant formula.

Tip! Meals and snacks are reimbursable even if all of the required components are not offered at the same time, as long as all of the required food components are offered during a span of time that is consistent with the infant’s eating habits.

Tip! CNP Operators must document the types and quantities of solid foods offered. (Family child care home providers are exempt from documenting quantities of solid foods offered.)

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.