

# Health Concerns for Feeding Solid Foods Too Early

## **1. Babies are not physically ready to eat or digest anything other than breast milk or formula until they are close to 6 months old.**

Between 4 and 6 months old, a baby will begin to be able to eat solids foods (sit up, hold head steady, open mouth for spoon). A baby's body will also be able to digest solid foods starting between 4 and 6 months old. By 6 months, a baby's body will be ready for solids foods.

## **2. Solid foods will hurt the baby's digestive tract (the stomach and intestines.)**

Babies are not born with a fully developed digestive tract; that is why humans make breast milk for their babies. Breast milk (and formula) can be digested by babies. Other foods ("solid food" or "complementary food") cannot be fully digested by the intestines. Giving solid foods too early can cause the digestive tract to be damaged. It can also cause the food to move slowly through the body and result in the baby having an upset stomach, constipation, gas, and pain. The digestive tract is ready for solid foods closer to 6 months old.

## **3. Solid foods can cause the baby to choke.**

Babies do not need teeth to eat solid foods. They can eat finely ground up foods (such as baby cereal) using their gums and tongue. *But*, they need to be able to sit up with help, have control of their head, and have control over their gag reflex. If they cannot do these things, they may choke on the solid food.

## **4. Solid foods can cause the baby to eat too much.**

Babies under 6 months old do not give clear signals that they are full, which make it harder for the mother to see when she should stop feeding. Giving cereal in a bottle may cause overfeeding or choking. Because bottle-feeding is faster than spoon-feeding, infants may not have that "full" feeling until after they "drink" too much cereal. Mothers should never give their babies cereal in the bottle.

**5. A baby given solids too early may be at higher risk for developing allergies.**

In families where there is a history of allergies, waiting to give solids until your baby is at least 4 months old might decrease the chance of the baby developing allergies.

**6. Babies given solid foods too early are at higher risk of developing diabetes.**

**7. Solid foods will replace the breast milk or formula that is best for the baby's nutritional needs.**

Breast milk and formula are made to meet all the baby's nutrient needs for the first 6 months of life. Other foods will displace breast milk or formula, and will not provide all the nutrients the baby needs.

**8. Research studies show that giving babies cereal before they are 6 months does not help them sleep through the night.**

If a small baby's tummy is full after getting cereal or other solid, it may be because the baby cannot digest the cereal. Babies sleep through the night when their nervous system matures, which is different for every baby.