

# HEALTHY BEGINNINGS

## SELF-FEEDING RIGHT FROM THE START

When babies are six months, they are ready to eat a variety of textures and can even begin to self-feed. Gone are the days of only offering pureed foods on a spoon to babies.

### OFFER MORE THAN JUST PUREES

When your baby begins eating solid foods (at about six months of age), offer a variety of food textures including purees, mashed, lumpy, shredded, ground or minced, and small pieces of soft foods, often called finger foods.

Research suggests it is important to introduce textures between six and nine months. Waiting beyond the age of nine months can lead to:

- Feeding problems later on
- Eating less vegetables and fruit

Finger foods can be offered, even before your baby has any teeth!

### SELF-FEEDING

You can support your baby or toddler to learn to self-feed.

Self-feeding, which allows your child to be more independent, is part of healthy child development. You might see this when your baby grabs the spoon or pieces of food to self-feed.

### PUBLIC HEALTH

1-877-464-9675  
TTY 1-866-512-6228  
[york.ca/feedingkids](http://york.ca/feedingkids)



Learning to spoon-feed takes time and using their fingers to eat is easier. At first, your baby may grab pieces of food from their tray in their fist and put it into their mouth. Next, they will pick up food with their thumb and index finger.

### EXPECT A MESS

Learning to self-feed is messy and takes practice and your patience. To help with clean up, place a mat or towel on the floor or use a bib with a pocket to catch dropped food. A damp cloth (or a wash) at the end of the meal can clean up spills and sticky hands.

### GAGGING IS NORMAL

When new textures or foods are offered, children may gag or cough as part of the normal learning process or to prevent choking. If gagging occurs, remain calm. If gagging happens a lot or gets worse, contact your child's health care provider.

## OFFER FOODS THAT YOU EAT

Adjust the texture of the foods you serve to the rest of the family.

Food “puffs” and rice rusks are processed foods that offer very little nutrition and are not a substitute for offering pieces of healthy foods.

## EXPLORE FINGER-FEEDING

Finger foods are soft, cut-up foods that can easily be picked up. In addition to the foods listed below, you can cut up foods that you are eating yourself.

### Vegetables and fruit

- Cooked fresh or frozen vegetables
- Canned, no-added-salt vegetables
- Soft ripe fruit or shredded apples or pears
- Canned fruit packed in water or juice

### Whole grains

- Whole grain toast, roti, naan or tortilla
- Whole grain o-shaped cereal
- Whole grain muffins, pancakes or waffles
- Rice, rice noodles or pasta of any shape

### Protein foods

- Beef, lamb, chicken or turkey (including ground) cooked in broth or water
- Fresh, frozen or canned fish (without bones)
- Eggs (e.g. scrambled, omelets, French toast)
- Boiled or canned beans or chickpeas (rinsed with water)
- Boiled edamame (removed from the pod)
- Firm or extra firm tofu
- Grated or small cubes of cheese

## COMBINING SPOON-FEEDING AND FINGER FOODS

If you are feeding your child with a spoon, let them hold their own spoon.

You can try doing hand-over-hand to help guide the spoon into their mouth.

You can offer finger foods and spoon-fed foods at the same time. If your child shows you they are not interested in being spoon-fed, it is time to offer only finger foods they can feed themselves.

## LOWER THE RISK OF CHOKING

To lower the risk of choking, offer pieces of soft food that are no larger than half centimetre ( $\frac{1}{4}$  inch) to one centimetre ( $\frac{1}{2}$  inch) pieces in size. This is big enough for little hands to grab and lowers the risk of choking. As your child gets older, pieces can become bite-sized but remain soft.



$\frac{1}{2}$  centimetre ( $\frac{1}{4}$  inch)



1 centimetre ( $\frac{1}{2}$  inch)

### Avoid foods that are:

- Hard (e.g., peanuts/nuts and seeds, chunks of meat or cheese, hard candies, chunks of hard vegetables like raw carrots, apples)
- Small and round (e.g., popcorn, gumballs, grapes, hot dogs)
- Smooth and sticky (e.g., peanut butter spread thick or on a spoon, sticky candy)

## WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

For more information and additional nutrition resources, visit [york.ca/feedingkids](http://york.ca/feedingkids) or [unlockfood.ca](http://unlockfood.ca)

To speak to a registered dietitian at no cost, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.

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