

Are you really telling me to Give My Baby Peanutbutter?

Yes! Starting peanut butter early may prevent peanut allergy in high risk babies!

by Monica Hamburg, MD



The risk of peanut allergy decreased by 80% when babies ate 3 teaspoons of peanut butter per week!



Smooth peanut butter mixed with baby food



Avoid to age 5 years!

You may have seen recent media reports about peanut butter for babies. Research has shown that feeding peanut butter to babies in early infancy may help prevent peanut allergy. This is exciting news as peanut allergy affects one in every 50 children! The *American Academy of Pediatrics* now has guidelines for parents of babies at high risk for allergy, and we expect these recommendations may soon apply to all babies. It appears that starting certain foods earlier in life actually prevents allergies!

To review: In year 2000, the *AAP* advised parents to wait until one year old to introduce regular cow's milk, age 2 for eggs and age 3 for peanuts/tree nuts/fish, thinking this would prevent allergies to these foods. Guidelines were changed in 2008 after research showed that delaying these foods likely did **not** prevent allergies. Yet, the 2008 guidelines did not answer the question about when to introduce these foods.

Now research shows that delaying the start of allergenic foods may actually **cause** allergies. 2015 guidelines just released from the *AAP* now advise giving high risk infants (infants with egg allergy, severe eczema, or strong family history of allergies) small amounts of peanut butter frequently starting at 4-11 months of age (we generally don't recommend solid foods before 6 months)! Of course the amount should be very small mixed with baby food for younger infants (to prevent choking) or a very thin layer of creamy/not chunky mixed with about an ounce of milk or water for older infants. How much should you give? We don't know the ideal amount yet, but in this research study **3 teaspoons per week** was enough. The *AAP* recommends that infants who have egg allergy or who have severe eczema should see an allergist prior to starting peanut butter.

While the official guidelines as they stand are only for peanut butter and only for high risk infants, stay tuned, as we expect more general guidelines to appear in the near future. Allergenic foods should always be tried first at home, not at daycare or at a restaurant. Cow's milk should still be avoided until 1 year of age to prevent gastrointestinal bleeding (not because of allergy). Shelled peanuts and tree nuts are still a choking risk and should be avoided until age 5. It's amazing to learn we can decrease peanut allergy risk by 80%!

Clarkstown Parentletter Douglas Puder, MD,FAAP, Editor,Illustrator
Monica Hamburg, MD, FAAP, Asst Editor Jeffrey Karasik,MD,FAAP Gregg Rockower, MD, FAAP

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