

# INTRODUCING PRIORITY ALLERGENS

## An Infant Feeding Guide



A  lergy  
Quebec

Questions often arise when parents are faced with introducing priority allergens in their child's diet. This step-by-step guide aims to facilitate and optimize this milestone. Priority allergens include peanuts, tree nuts, eggs, wheat, cow's milk, soy, sesame, mustard, fish, crustaceans and molluscs.

The most recent position statement from the [Canadian Paediatric Society](#) states: "For **high-risk infants**, encourage the introduction of allergenic foods (e.g., cooked [not raw] egg, peanut) early, **at about 6 months and not before 4 months of age**, in a safe and developmentally appropriate way, at home. In **infants at low risk** for food allergy, allergenic foods can also be introduced **at around 6 months of age.**"

The introduction table presented in this document explains how to incorporate priority allergens and provides food examples according to two feeding approaches: purées and baby-led weaning (BLW). For **initial exposures**, it is recommended to offer allergenic foods by spoon (see the PURÉE examples) rather than letting the child handle them. This helps prevent skin irritation that could be mistaken for an allergic reaction. Once you have offered a food by spoon a few times without any reaction, you may continue offering it regularly using your preferred feeding method.

## Procedure for the introduction

Introducing priority allergens to infants at the **recommended age** and when they are [ready](#) for complementary foods may help prevent the development of food allergies and allow for their early detection. Here are the steps to follow:

1. Introduce allergenic foods for the first time **at home** and ensure the infant stays awake **for two hours** after ingestion in case allergy symptoms develop.
2. Only introduce allergenic foods when your infant is **not sick or undergoing medical treatment**.
  - The goal is to be able to clearly identify the causes of any symptoms or reactions.
3. It is often recommended that priority allergens be introduced once the infant can tolerate a few other typical staple foods, such as grains, fruits, and vegetables.
4. **Start** by offering **a small amount** on the tip of a spoon and wait approximately 10 minutes. If no symptoms occur, continue offering the food at the child's usual pace.
5. Be sure to **give the food orally** and avoid applying allergens to the skin during introduction. A skin reaction does not necessarily indicate the presence of a food allergy.
6. Depending on your comfort level, introduce new priority allergens on consecutive days.
  - There is no conclusive evidence that this approach could be harmful.
  - If you decide to space out each introduction by a few days, note that it is best **not to wait unnecessarily** before continuing to offer new foods.
7. Once the allergen has been introduced, be sure to **continue offering it to your infant regularly** in age-appropriate portions to **maintain tolerance**.
  - Regular exposure **a few times a week** is recommended when possible (with a goal of at least once a week).
  - Current data suggest that, once allergens are introduced, a single exposure, or even occasional exposures, could be harmful and lead to an increased risk of sensitization and the development of food allergy.
  - Avoid intermittent supplementation with intact cow's milk formula (e.g., a few occasional bottles for an infant who is mainly breastfed), as this increases the risk of cow's milk allergy. If you have started using this type of formula, maintain regular intake (as little as 10 ml per day) to prevent loss of tolerance.

8. If you suspect an adverse reaction, we recommend that you **stop introducing the food in question and consult a doctor or allergist**. You may, however, **continue** introducing **other allergens** to your child.

*If you have concerns about your child's risk of developing a food allergy, we encourage you to discuss them with a healthcare professional. However, this cannot delay the start of priority allergen introduction.*

## Signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction

For a complete list of signs and symptoms to watch for in the event of an allergic reaction, please visit [Allergy Quebec's website](#) and refer to this section: [What is anaphylaxis?](#)

Common symptoms associated with a first reaction include:

- **Rash, swelling, and itchy skin (hives)**
- **Projectile vomiting**

**Behavioural changes** should also be monitored: irritability, drowsiness, inconsolable crying, and an overwhelming need to be close to a parent or caregiver.

During a severe allergic reaction, the child may experience

- **Persistent coughing, wheezing, and/or difficulty breathing**
- **Swelling of the lips, tongue, and throat**

*Please note that the risk of a severe reaction during the first exposure to an allergen is very low in infants. No infant deaths have been reported under such circumstances.*

## Priority allergen introduction table

**Note:** The ideal age to introduce allergens to your baby will depend on their risk of developing a food allergy. They should also be ready to eat complementary foods. If you have concerns regarding this process, discuss them promptly with a healthcare provider rather than delay introduction.

**High-risk infant:** has either a personal history of atopy or a first-degree relative (at least one parent, a sister or a brother) with an atopic condition such as asthma, allergic rhinitis, food allergy, or eczema.

➔ Encourage the early introduction of allergenic foods such as peanuts and cooked eggs (not raw) at home, around six months of age, but not before four months of age, in a safe and developmentally appropriate manner.

**Low-risk infants:** allergenic foods may also be introduced around six months of age.

**Reminder:** We recommend spoon-feeding allergens during the initial exposure. Once the food has been offered a few times by spoon without reaction, you can then use the feeding method of your choice (pureed food or baby-led weaning) and continue offering the food on a regular basis.

## PEANUTS

- Once successfully introduced, offer peanuts regularly to maintain tolerance (ideally a few times a week, aiming for at least once a week).
- **Choking hazard:** For children under 4 years of age, do not introduce peanuts whole nor peanut butter by spoon.

and

## TREE NUTS

- A baby may be allergic to just one type of tree nut but not to others, which is why tree nuts should be introduced one at a time (e.g., hazelnuts, pecans, cashews, pistachios, almonds...), starting with those that are regularly eaten at home.
- Tree nuts pose the same choking hazard as peanuts and should not be eaten whole or as tree nut butter by spoon for children under 4 years of age.
- **Tip:** Eating mixed tree nut butter on a weekly basis provides regular exposure to several varieties of tree nuts.

### Examples PURÉE

- Add 1 teaspoon of tree nut beverage (such as cashew or almond) to a fruit or vegetable purée.
- Mix 1/2 teaspoon of peanut butter or tree nut butter into breastmilk (or commercial infant formula), then stir it into a purée.
- Add 1/4 teaspoon of peanut or tree nut powder to a purée or baby cereal.

### Examples BLW (subsequent exposures)

- Spread a thin layer (about 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon) of peanut butter or tree nut butter on a food vehicle (such as a piece of toast\*\*, a small age-appropriate baby cracker, or a banana).
- Add peanut or tree nut powder to a recipe.

**\*\* To reduce the risk of choking, do not serve on a slice of untoasted bread.**

## EGGS

- Once successfully introduced, offer eggs regularly to maintain tolerance.
- It is important to cook the whole egg (both the white and the yolk) thoroughly to prevent food poisoning.
- Both the egg white and the yolk are safe for your baby to eat. If they don't have a big appetite, start feeding with the yolk, as it contains more nutrients, such as iron.

### Examples PURÉE

- Prepare a hard-boiled egg. Take ½ to 1 teaspoon of the egg and mash it with breastmilk or commercial infant formula to make a smooth purée.

### Examples BLW (subsequent exposures)

- Homemade muffin containing eggs.
- Homemade pancakes or waffles made with eggs and cut into strips.
- A thin slice of omelette cut lengthwise so your baby can pick it up with their hands.

## WHEAT

- **Several terms may indicate the presence of wheat** in a food product, including bulgur, couscous, spelt, gluten, flour, Kamut, seitan, semolina, bran, triticale, etc. Please refer to the [Canadian Food Inspection Agency's](#) website for a complete list.

### Examples PURÉE

- Offer a baby cereal containing wheat.
- Add 1 to 2 teaspoons of cream of wheat to a purée or mix it with breastmilk.

### Examples BLW (subsequent exposures)

- Offer a slice of lightly toasted, minimally processed, low-sodium whole-wheat bread (be sure to read the labels carefully).
- Offer well-cooked wheat pasta.
- Prepare recipes made with wheat flour (e.g., pancakes, waffles, muffins).

## COW'S MILK

- Cow's milk should not replace breastmilk or commercial infant formula as a daily beverage before the age of 9 to 12 months, as this could reduce the child's appetite, interfere with iron intake, cause gastrointestinal symptoms, and delay the introduction of solid foods.
- However, milk can be offered in small amounts around 6 months of age as an ingredient in a recipe.
- Never offer unpasteurized dairy products.
- Do not confuse a milk allergy with lactose intolerance. For more information on this topic, please visit this [link](#).

Examples PURÉE	Examples BLW (subsequent exposures)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Give about 2 teaspoons of plain yogurt (4–10% fat) on its own or mix it into a purée containing fruit or vegetables.</li> <li>○ Add 2 teaspoons of fresh cheese, such as ricotta, to a vegetable purée.</li> <li>○ Offer cereal containing milk powder* or add ½ teaspoon of milk powder to a fruit or vegetable purée.</li> </ul> <p><i>* If you choose a wheat cereal that contains milk powder, make sure wheat has already been introduced.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Prepare recipes using milk or yogurt (e.g., muffins, cookies).</li> <li>○ Homemade pancakes or waffles made with milk and cut into strips.</li> <li>○ Spread a thin layer of plain yogurt, about 2 teaspoons, on a food vehicle.</li> <li>○ Offer a piece of hard cheese cut into strips or grated (equivalent to 2 tablespoons).</li> </ul>

## SOY

- Soy belongs to the legume family.
- A child may be allergic to soy but not to other legumes.
- Consuming soybean oil or soy lecithin **is not** considered exposure to this allergen.

Examples PURÉE	Examples BLW (subsequent exposures)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Add about 1 to 2 teaspoons of unsweetened soy beverage or plain silken tofu to a purée and mix well.</li> <li>○ Serve about 1 teaspoon of cooked edamame purée on its own or mix it into a vegetable purée.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Offer grated tofu (about 1 to 2 teaspoons).</li> <li>○ Cut a piece of tofu into long sticks following the principles of baby-led weaning (equivalent to about 1 or 2 tablespoons).</li> <li>○ Cook with soy beverage.</li> <li>○ Offer tofu spread on a food vehicle.</li> </ul>

## SESAME

**Warning:** To reduce the risk of choking on sticky foods such as sesame paste (tahini), do not feed it by spoon to children under 4 years of age.

Examples PURÉE	Examples BLW (subsequent exposures)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mix a small amount of hummus (1 teaspoon) made with tahini into a vegetable or fruit purée.</li> <li>○ Mix about 1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon of tahini into a purée. Only a small amount is needed as tahini is very concentrated.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Spread a thin layer of hummus made with tahini (about 1 teaspoon) on a food vehicle.</li> <li>○ Make recipes that use tahini as an ingredient (muffins, cookies, etc.).</li> </ul>

## MUSTARD

- Mustard powder or prepared mustard (a condiment) can be served in small amounts.

Examples PURÉE	Examples BLW (subsequent exposures)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Add a few pinches of mustard powder to a purée of your choice.</li> <li>○ Add ½ teaspoon of prepared mustard to a purée of your choice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Add mustard powder or prepared mustard to a croquette recipe or another recipe.</li> <li>○ Spread a small amount of prepared mustard on a food of your choice.</li> </ul>

## FISH, CRUSTACEANS AND MOLLUSCS

- Introduce each type of fish, crustaceans and molluscs to your child's diet, because just like with tree nuts, your child might be allergic to one type but not others. Start with the fish, crustacean and/or mollusc that are already part of your family's diet.
- Be sure to cook the fish you give your child **thoroughly and to remove all bones**.
- Avoid fish that contain heavy metals and pollutants. Make sure the fish you serve is very fresh. Refer to the [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](https://www.inspection.gc.ca/food) website.

Examples PURÉE	Examples BLW (subsequent exposures)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mash 1 teaspoon of fish with a fork and serve it as is or mix it into a vegetable purée.</li> <li>○ If desired, process in a food processor or blender for a smoother texture.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Offer your baby a piece of tender fish that's large enough for them to hold in their hands or give them some very tender strips of fish.</li> <li>○ Incorporate it into a homemade fish cake recipe.</li> <li>○ Make a spread using shrimp or other crustacean/mollusc.</li> </ul>

**IMPORTANT:** Several foods and recipes listed in the table may contain **more than one priority allergen**. Be sure to keep this in mind if you choose to introduce a single allergen at a time.

## Bibliography

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If you have further questions about the introduction of priority allergens, please contact our free support line at 514-990-2575 ext. 204 or at [nutritionniste@allergiesquebec.ca](mailto:nutritionniste@allergiesquebec.ca). A registered dietitian with expertise in food allergies will be happy to assist you.