

Weaning



The information in this leaflet will help you wean your baby onto solid foods.

Your baby's development from breast or formula milk feeding to sharing in the family meal is one of the first stages of growing up.

Enjoy it. Encourage it. Don't force it.

Let it happen at its own pace, and if you have any worries talk to your health visitor or GP.

What is weaning?



Weaning means introducing a range of 'non-milk' foods gradually until your baby is eating the same foods as the rest of your family.

Until six months, your baby has needed only breastmilk or infant formula milk. From about six months your baby has developed so that he or she is able to eat solid foods. Your baby now needs more than milk alone can provide.

By six months, your baby will be developing the skills to sit up, hold objects and put them to his or her mouth, and will show signs of being interested in the food you and your family are eating.

When to start

At about six months babies can easily be moved onto a mixed diet.

Try giving solid foods when your baby:

- Can sit up
- Shows interest in solid food
- Picks up food and puts it in his or her mouth
- Wants to chew and may have teeth
- Appears to still be hungry even though you have tried increasing milk feeds for a few days.





Solid foods should not be introduced before the end of your baby's fourth month (at 20 weeks). If you decide to introduce your baby to solid foods before six months there are many foods that should be avoided. These include foods which contain wheat, gluten, eggs, fish, shellfish, liver, citrus fruits, soft and unpasteurised cheeses.

You need to ask your health visitor for advice, especially if your baby was premature.

HANDY HINT

Never leave your baby alone when eating. Talk to your baby quietly and encourage them to eat.

How to start

Start by offering a small amount of mashed vegetable or fruit after a milk feed or in the middle of one, if this works better. If the food is hot, make sure you stir it and test it before giving it to your baby.

Most babies take time to learn how to take food from a spoon and some manage better with their fingers, so be patient and be prepared for some mess. Your baby will be finding out about different tastes and textures and learning that food doesn't come in a continuous flow.



HANDY HINT

Make sure your baby is sitting up straight and is facing forward. A highchair is best. This way your baby is able to explore foods better and will be less likely to choke.



CUPS

If you are bottle feeding, comfort sucking on a bottle can become a habit that's hard to break. Introduce a cup at six months and aim to have your baby off the bottle by their first birthday. Using a cup is better for your baby's teeth.

- Don't press food on your baby. If the food doesn't seem to be wanted, wait and try again later.
- Don't add any foods (including rusks) to a bottle containing milk.
- Wait for your baby to open his or her mouth when food is offered.
- Let your baby touch the food in the dish or on the spoon.
- Allow your baby to feed themselves, using their fingers, as soon as they show an interest.
- Give your baby a range of foods and textures to taste.

HANDY HINT

Water is the best alternative drink to milk, if you choose to give juice dilute it one part juice to ten parts water.

First foods

You could try:

- Mashed cooked vegetables such as carrot, parsnip, potato, rice or yam
- Mashed banana, avocado, cooked apple or pear
- Baby rice mixed with your baby's usual milk.

Use mashed-up family food when you can. It's best to cook your own food for your baby. This way, you'll know the ingredients of the food and you'll be getting your baby used to eating what you eat. Don't add salt or sugar to food for your baby.



As your baby takes more solid foods, he or she will take less milk. Milk is still an important part of your baby's diet. Carry on breastfeeding or giving infant formula milk each day until at least 12 months of age. Cow's milk is not suitable as a drink until your baby is 12 months old but can be used in cooking.

More foods to try

As well as vegetable and fruit you can add other foods, such as:

- Mashed-up meat, fish and chicken
- Mashed lentils (dahl) or split pulses
- Full-fat dairy products, such as yoghurt, fromage frais or custard.

See how your baby responds to the different flavours and textures. Offer your baby finger foods such as small pieces of fruit and vegetables or toast. How much your baby takes is less important than getting used to the idea of food other than milk.

FINGER FOODS

Encourage your baby to chew, even if they don't have teeth, by giving finger foods. For example, raw or cooked and cooled green beans, carrot sticks, cubes of cheese, toast, bread, pitta bread or chapatti, peeled apple and banana. Some babies prefer food they can hold to mashed foods, so offer your baby finger foods from the beginning. Finger foods provide chewing practice and encourage babies to feed themselves.

Avoid sweet biscuits and rusks so that your baby does not get into the habit of expecting sweet snacks.

How much



When you are both ready, you can start to increase the amount of solid food you give. Try to react to your baby's appetite, so if your baby is still hungry, you can give a little more. Your baby is the best guide to how much solid food you need to give.

Offer two to three servings each day of starchy foods such as potatoes, yams, rice or bread and two servings of fruit and vegetables. Your baby should have one serving of soft cooked meat, fish, eggs, tofu or pulses such as beans or lentils (dahl) a day. Red meat (beef, lamb and pork) is an excellent source of iron. Eggs are a quick, nutritious and cheap source of protein, but make sure they are thoroughly cooked until both the white and yolk are solid.

Begin to add different foods and different tastes. You'll be able to use lots of the foods you already cook for yourself. Just mash a small amount cooked with no added salt or sugar and give it a try.

How often

Move gradually from offering solid food once a day to solid food at two and then three feeds. You will find that as your baby eats more solid foods, the amount of milk he or she wants will start to reduce. Once your baby is taking solid foods three times a day, if you are breastfeeding you may find that he or she wants to be breastfed less often. If you are bottle feeding you can drop a milk feed but continue to give infant formula milk to your baby until 12 months of age.



HANDY HINT

Don't rush or force feed. Most babies know when they've had enough to eat. Go at your baby's pace. Be patient. If your baby shakes his or her head, turns away or refuses to open their mouth, take the food away and try again later.

From about nine months

From about nine months, offer your baby three to four servings of starchy food each day, such as potato, bread and rice, and three to four servings of fruit and vegetables. Vitamin C in fruit and vegetables helps to absorb iron, so give fruit and vegetables at mealtimes.

By now your baby should be learning to fit in with the family by eating three minced or chopped meals a day as well as milk. Your baby should also have healthy snacks such as fruit in between meals. Fruit is better than biscuits, which could give your baby a sweet tooth and fill him or her up without providing the right nutrients.



HANDY HINT

Include your baby in the family mealtime routine. Feed your baby while family members are eating.



If your baby is on the move, you may need to increase the amount of food you give. Babies have small tummies, and they need energy for growth, so make sure you give them full-fat dairy products, such as yoghurt, fromage frais and cheese. Cutting back on fat is sensible for adults but not for babies.

If you have decided not to give your baby meat or fish, make sure that you give two servings a day of split pulses (red lentils, split peas), tofu, soya pieces or eggs.

Vitamin D is naturally present in only a few foods such as fortified margarines, eggs and fatty fish. It is also made naturally in the skin when it is exposed to gentle sunlight. It is sensible to give all babies vitamin drops from the age of one to five years old.

HANDY HINT

Offer a wide variety of foods that you and your family usually eat, as this might help avoid choosiness later on.

Allergies

Babies are more likely to develop allergies if there is a family history of eczema, asthma or hayfever. For these families, exclusive breastfeeding is particularly recommended for the first six months. Introduce the foods that commonly cause allergies (milk, eggs, wheat, peanuts, nuts, seeds, fish and shellfish) one at a time so that you can spot any reaction, but don't introduce any of these foods before six months.

Soya-based infant formulas should only be used on the advice of your GP or health visitor. Some babies who are allergic to cow's milk may also be allergic to soya. Infant formulas based on goat's milk protein have not been approved for use in Europe.



CHOKING

Babies can choke on foods so be careful with hard foods such as raw carrot sticks or large apple pieces or small round foods like grapes. Also be careful with foods with skin (like sausages) or fish with bones. Cut food into small pieces and remove all skin and bones or lightly cook vegetables like carrots before feeding to your baby.

Foods to avoid

SALT

From 7-12 months babies should not have more than one gram of salt per day. Breastmilk and infant formula milk both contain salt. Do not add any salt to foods for babies. When you are cooking for the family, do not add salt, so your baby can share the family foods.

SUGAR

Sugar can encourage a sweet tooth and lead to tooth decay when first teeth start to come through. Try mashed banana, breast or formula milk to sweeten food if necessary.

HONEY

Don't give honey until your baby is one year old. Very occasionally, it can contain a type of bacteria, which can produce toxins in the baby's intestines and can cause a very serious illness (infant botulism).

Remember that honey is also a sugar and can lead to tooth decay.

NUTS

Whole nuts, including peanuts, should not be given to children under five years in case of choking.

LOW-FAT FOODS

Low-fat foods, whether yoghurt, fromage frais, cheese or fat spreads are not suitable for babies or children under two. Fat is an important source of calories and some vitamins which they need.

Remember to check the food label

Ready-prepared baby foods

It can be useful to have a few jars, tins or packets of baby food in the cupboard, but don't let them replace family food altogether. Your baby needs to learn to eat family foods.

If you buy baby foods:

- Check the 'use by' and 'best before' dates
- Check that the seals on cans and jars haven't been broken
- Choose 'sugar free' foods, or foods which do not contain added sugars or sweeteners.



Remember to check the label of any food product you use to make family meals. Many of the food products we buy such as sauces, soups, breakfast cereals and ready-prepared meals are high in salt and sugars. Try to check the labels for healthier versions.



HANDY HINT

Cover the floor with newspapers or a protective mat and use a bib to catch food spills. Weaning can be a messy business.

Safety & hygiene

Ensure your baby is not at risk from germs as a result of food preparation and serving.

- Always wash your hands well before preparing your baby's food.
- Check that your baby's hands are clean before feeding.
- Keep surfaces clean and prevent pets from coming near food or surfaces where food is prepared.
- Keep chopping boards thoroughly clean.
- Keep cooked and raw meats covered and away from each other and from other foods in the fridge.
- Thoroughly wash all bowls and spoons for feeding in hot soapy water.
- Don't save and re-use foods that your baby has half eaten. It may result in a tummy upset.
- Cooked food should not be reheated more than once.
- Always check the temperature of the food before giving it to your baby – it should be lukewarm, never very cold nor piping hot.
- Wash and peel fruit and vegetables, such as apples and carrots.
- Avoid raw eggs.



Freezing and reheating food

- Cool food as quickly as possible and freeze.
- Make sure food is fully and safely thawed when defrosting.
- Reheat food thoroughly so it is piping hot all the way through.

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