

Nutrition and Dietetics

Starting your baby on solid food

Who is this advice for?

This information is for parents and carers of young babies who will soon be ready to move from a milk-only diet to milk and solid foods. If your baby is gaining weight well, milk will provide all the food your baby needs. Babies should not need solids until they are around 6 months old, even if they seem hungry.

If your baby is not gaining weight well, always seems hungry, or you are not sure whether it's the right time to start solids, ask your health visitor for advice.

What is weaning?

Weaning is when your baby's food changes from milk only, to milk and solids. From this time onwards, other foods as well as milk will help with growth and development.

When do I start?

The Department of Health recommend that all babies without health problems start on solids at around the age of 6 months. Starting too early can damage your baby's health, so it is advised that weaning does not begin before 17 weeks. By 8 months your baby should be eating a variety of foods and should cope with a range of food textures, not just soft food.



Is your baby ready?

Your baby is ready if they can do all of the following:

- Stay in a sitting position and hold their head steady
- Pick food up and put it in their mouth without help
- Swallow food without too much being pushed out their mouth

When you introduce solids at 6 months, try to introduce new foods quickly.

Vary the food choice and **include iron-rich foods** such as meats, beans and pulses **from the start**.

Best time of day? What to start with?

Choose a time when the baby is showing signs of hunger, but is not upset.

Here are some first foods you might want to try:

- Mashed or puréed cooked vegetables such as potato, sweet potato or yam, mixed together with parsnip, carrot, broccoli or cauliflower
- Mashed ripe fruit such as banana, avocado, cooked apple, pear or mango
- Baby rice or well cooked and mashed white rice, oats or other starchy foods such as maize, millet, cornmeal or noodles
- Blended or puréed meat, fish or chicken – well cooked and prepared without salt. Remember to remove any bones.
- Soft cooked and puréed or well mashed lentils (dhal), split peas, chickpeas or other pulses
- Full-fat milk products such as yoghurt, fromage frais or custard (choose lower-sugar varieties)

By 6 months, most babies can quickly learn to cope with soft lumpy food, even if they have no teeth – just make sure the food is fairly soft.

Give your baby whatever you feel comfortable with offering as their first foods, or what your baby seems most interested in. **Check the information on foods to avoid – see page 3 and 4.**

Baby-led weaning (BLW)

Baby-led weaning (BLW) is a way of introducing solid foods that allows your baby to feed themselves. There's no use of a spoon, just fingers. Small chunks of food are introduced immediately, without going through the puree stage.

Baby-led weaning:

- allows babies to explore taste, texture, colour and smell
- encourages independence and confidence
- helps to develop your babies hand-eye coordination and chewing skills
- makes picky eating and mealtime battles potentially less likely

However, this isn't suitable for all babies. The official advice is to give your baby well-mashed or pureed foods at the beginning of weaning, as well as finger food. The Department of Health, the European Union, and the World Health Organisation all recommend this. All healthy babies can begin to feed themselves from about six months; they just need to be given the opportunity.

For more information on BLW, visit

<https://www.babycentre.co.uk/a1007100/baby-led-weaning>

What about ready-prepared baby foods?

Tins, jars or packets of foods can be useful, but do not let them replace family foods altogether. The portion sizes are often large and the texture may not vary much.

Having these too often may stop your baby from liking other foods. Home-made foods are cheaper to make and will tend to have less salt and sugar, as long as you haven't added these during preparation.

What drinks should I give?

Before babies have started on solid foods, they don't generally need any drinks other than breast or formula milk.

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In very hot weather, you could give a bottle-fed baby a little cooled boiled water if they seems thirsty between feeds. Even on hot days, breast milk usually provides as much fluid as baby needs so extra water may not be necessary.

Carry on giving your baby breast or formula milk until he or she is at least a year old. Follow-on milk **may** be used after 6 months, but it is not necessary to change to this.

Cow's milk:

Whole milk isn't suitable as a feed or drink until your baby is 1 years old. You can use whole milk in cooking for your baby from six months onwards.

Semi-skimmed milk isn't suitable as a drink until a child is two years old.

Skimmed milk or 1% fat milk isn't suitable until a child is five years old.

Fruit juice

Most fruit juice is a good source of vitamin C. But it also contains natural sugars and is acidic, which means it can cause tooth decay.

If you do offer it, always dilute it well with water and offer it in a feeding cup at mealtimes only.

Drinks to avoid

The following drinks may contain too much of either sugar or other ingredients, and aren't suitable for babies:

- “Juice drinks”, fizzy drinks, sugary drinks and squashes
- Diet drinks, “low-calorie” and “no added sugar” drinks
- Flavoured milks and flavoured waters
- Baby drinks and herbal drinks
- Tea and coffee - they reduce the absorption of iron from foods

Foods to avoid

Low-fat and low-calorie foods

Babies need foods that provide lots of calories and nutrients in a small amount of food.

Fat gives them energy and provides some vitamins that are only found in fat, so choose full-fat dairy foods.

High-fibre products

A small amount of high-fibre starchy foods such as wholemeal bread or whole wheat breakfast cereal are fine. But too much of this is very filling and may stop your child eating other important foods.

Give your baby mainly low-fibre starchy foods during the day, such as white bread.

Young children are not ready for a high-fibre diet and this should be very gradually introduced from weaning until they are at school.

Salt

Don't add any salt to the foods you give your baby because a young baby's kidneys can't cope with it. Some foods, such as cheese, sausages and bacon, are high in salt, so limit how much of these foods give your baby.

Baby foods aren't allowed to contain added salt, but may still contain ingredients with a high salt content. Also, any foods you buy that haven't been made specifically for babies, especially sauces and ready-made porridge can often be high in salt. So limit how much of these you let your baby eat and remember to check the label.

Choose lower-salt versions for your baby whenever you can. Babies under a year should have less than 1g salt per day, which is less than 0.4g sodium per day. You can use these numbers as a guide when you're checking food labels.

Patient Information

Sugar

Sugary foods and drinks can encourage a sweet tooth and lead to tooth decay when your baby's teeth start to come through.

Honey should never be given to babies under 12 months as it may contain harmful bacteria.

Sweet puddings, biscuits, sweets and ice creams are not recommended for babies under a year.

Whole nuts

Don't give any whole nuts, including peanuts, to children under five because they could cause choking.

Babies can have nuts, finely ground or in food as a smooth paste (such as nut butter).

Some types of fish

Shark, swordfish and marlin are not suitable for babies. The levels of mercury in these fish can affect a baby's growing nervous system.

Raw shellfish can cause food poisoning and are not suitable for babies.

A note about eggs

The Food Standards Agency has recommended that if eggs have the "British Lion Mark" printed on them in red ink, then they are safe to eat for infants and young children even if lightly cooked (runny).

Should I give my child vitamin drops?

The Department of Health recommend that all children aged 6 months to 5 years should have vitamin supplements containing vitamins A, C & D.

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Bottle-fed babies drinking at least 500ml of formula milk a day do not need a supplement. If you qualify for Healthy Start, vitamin supplements are free.

It's also recommended that babies who are being breastfed are given a daily vitamin D supplement containing 300 – 400 iu Vitamin D (7.5 – 10 ug) from birth, whether or not you're taking a supplement containing vitamin D yourself.

For more advice, visit <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/vitamins-for-children/>

Other helpful hints

Do:

- Encourage lumpier foods as soon as possible. Your baby will soon get used to smooth foods and be able to swallow small lumps and drier food
- Freeze small portions of home-cooked foods as soon as they have cooled after cooking
- Introduce finger foods such as toast, chapatti, fruit and vegetables at around 6 - 7 months
- Encourage your baby to move from a bottle to a beaker from 6 months
- Relax and go at your babies pace
- Visit your clinic if you have any concerns about your baby's weight

Do not:

- Offer fizzy drinks - all fizzy drinks can cause tooth decay
- Allow your child to sip drinks continually from a cup or bottle unless it contains pure water
- Give wheat-containing foods before 6 months
- Give sweets or chocolate - they can make your baby gain too much weight and cause tooth decay
- Leave your baby alone when feeding

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Do not:

- Add any weaning foods to the bottle. Give foods separate to allow your child to experience different textures
- Change to soya, rice or goat's milk without first seeking medical advice. Soya milk should not be given to babies before 6 months
- Keep open jars or tins for longer than 24 hours. Store them in the fridge. Once they have been heated or baby has fed straight from the jar, do not keep them at all

Remember:

Babies like to feed themselves

It can be messy, but it is more interesting for your baby and encourages development.

Babies like to be with people

Try to eat at the same time as your baby. This way baby will learn how to behave with food.

Babies need to eat at their own pace

Try not to rush or force them.

Babies respond to parent's worries

Keep as calm as you can at mealtimes.

Do not despair if your baby will not eat the meal you have taken trouble to prepare.

If your baby does not like a particular food the first time, **try again at a later stage.**

Patient Information

Useful websites

Start4life www.nhs.uk/start4life

NHS Choices www.nhs.uk

British Dietetic Society

<https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/home>

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/complementary-feeding-weaning.html>.

Netmums www.netmums.com

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