

Weaning and introduction to solid foods

Hello everyone!

Hope you are all well and keeping safe during these challenging times.

My name is Donna, I'm an Early Years Practitioner and one of the sessions I facilitate is Weaning - Introducing Solid foods. We thought it may be helpful for parents and carers to have some tips on how to make introducing solid foods a success from the start, and share with you some of the topics we cover at our session. We have put together top tips and advice from the NHS/start4life website which you can access here <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/>

I hope you find it useful.



What will I need before I start?

A High chair - your baby needs to be sitting safely and strapped in, in an upright position (so they can swallow properly). If you don't have a high chair have a chat with your GP or health visitor who can they can advise you on alternatives.

A first cup - encourage your baby to sip water from a cup with their meals (instead of a bottle). Open cups or free-flow cups (without a valve) help your baby learn to sip and is better for their teeth.

Spoons - soft weaning spoons, usually made of rubber or plastic, are easier on your baby's gums.

Plastic bowls - ideally the ones with a suction base, otherwise they're likely to end up on the floor!

Ice cube trays - very useful for batch cooking and freezing small portions.

Bibs - easy to clean plastic or 'pelican bibs' are best in the beginning.

Messy mat - or even newspaper under the high chair, handy for messy eaters!



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Introducing solid foods is a hugely exciting time for your baby's learning and development, it's a time of experimentation and fun for you both as you introduce your baby to new foods, tastes and textures for the first time. You may find that you, your baby and the floor all get a little messy but that's fine, you're just getting started and it's all part of your weaning journey together!

When should I start my baby on solid foods?

Introducing your baby to solid foods, sometimes called weaning or complementary feeding, should start when your baby is around 6 months old, as they need more than breast milk or first infant formula to meet their needs. At this stage they need solid foods as well, not as a replacement, but alongside their usual breast milk or first infant formula milk (babies under 4 months should not be given solid foods unless a health professional has said they should).

At the beginning it is not about how much your baby eats, but about introducing them to new tastes and textures, getting them used to solid foods and to the idea of eating and exploring new foods offered. They'll still be getting most of their energy and nutrients from breast milk or first infant formula milk so don't worry if they don't seem to be actually eating very much to begin with.

Three signs your baby is ready to start on solids - Weaning:

- They can sit up and hold their head steady.
- They can co-ordinate their eyes, hands and mouth, so they can look at food, pick it up and put in their mouth all by themselves.
- They can swallow food. Babies who are not ready will push food back out of their mouths with their tongue.



Signs that can be mistaken for your baby being ready for solid food:

- Chewing their fists.
- Waking in the night, when they have previously slept through.
- Wanting extra milk feeds.

These are normal behaviors and not necessarily a sign of hunger or being ready to start solid food. Starting solid foods won't make a baby any more likely to sleep through the night and extra feeds are usually enough until they are ready for other foods.

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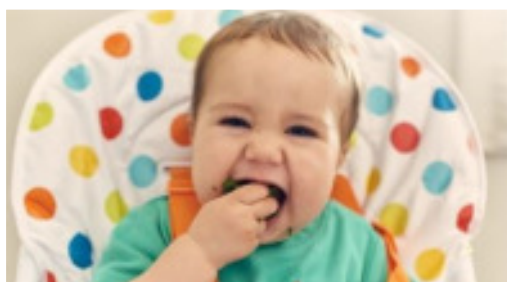
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When is the best time of day to start introducing solids to my baby, and how much should I give them?

When you do start introducing solid food ensure it is at a time of day that suits you both, when your baby is not too tired and when you have time and are not rushed. Start offering them food before their usual milk feed as they might not be interested if they're full, but don't wait until your baby's too hungry. This can be at breakfast, lunch or teatime - whatever suits you and your schedule. To start with, your baby only needs a small amount of solid food, once a day and how much they eat will depend on their appetite. Follow your baby's cues, go at their pace and stop when they show signs they have had enough in the same way you follow your baby's cues when offering them breast or bottle feeds. Be responsive to your baby when giving them solid foods, and learn to recognise the signs and cues your baby shows when they're hungry and when they've had enough.

Signs that your baby has had enough or is full:

- Pushing food or your hand away as you try to feed them.
- Closing their mouth or pressing their lips together when food is offered.
- Turning their head away from food.
- Using hand motions or making sounds to let you know they are full.
- Fidgeting or pushing up in their chair to try to get out.



Signs your baby is hungry:

- Reaches for or points to food.
- Opens their mouth when offered a spoon or food.
- Gets excited when they see the spoon or food, waving their arms and kicking their legs.
- They're alert, sitting attentively in their high chair, head and body leaning forward and towards the spoon, eyes wide open.
- They're happy, smiling, laughing, making cooing sounds as you feed them.
- Licking their lips, drooling and opening their mouth.
- They're engaged, trying to suck on their tongue, fingers, toes clothing.
- Uses hand motions or makes sounds to let you know they are still hungry.

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Weaning safely and foods to offer

Start weaning using smooth textured or pureed foods, as they are easy for your baby to learn how to swallow. Try blended, mashed, or soft cooked sticks of single vegetables and fruits such as parsnip, broccoli, potato, yam, sweet potato, carrot, apple or pear. You could also try baby rice mixed with your baby's usual milk. Make sure any cooked food has cooled down before offering it to your baby.

Include fruits and vegetables that aren't so sweet, such as broccoli, cauliflower, spinach and avocado. This will help your baby get used to a range of flavours, rather than just the sweeter ones like carrots, sweet potato, apples and pears. This can help prevent them being fussy eaters later on.

To help your baby get used to different textures and tastes quickly try moving on from purées or blended foods to mashed and finger foods as soon as you think they're ready. This helps them learn how to chew, move solid food around their mouth and swallow. Give your baby a spoon to hold when they are eating and let them try feeding themselves. This may get a little messy but it's all part of the fun and you may get some nice photographs of them trying new tastes and textures. All babies are unique and take different amounts of time to get used to lumps in food, but it's an important skill they need to learn. Just keep offering them lumpy textures from around 6 to 7 months, and stay with them so you can be sure they are swallowing it safely. If you want to start soft finer food, make sure your baby is at least 6 months old.

Your baby's gag reflex

Many parents that we speak to in our sessions are naturally worried that their baby may choke on their first solid foods but try not to worry too much.

- If your baby can't manage something they eat their natural gag reflex will normally help them to cough it up or spit it out.
- A baby's gag reflex is further forward in their mouth - on the tip of their tongue, which is why they will sometimes gag when trying solid foods for the first time.
- At around 4-6 months their gag reflex moves to the back of their throat just like an adult, but remember never leave your baby alone when they are eating.



What about milk feeds when weaning?

- Bottle fed babies need around 500-600ml of milk a day.
- Breastfeeding babies feed on demand as well as offering food.
- From 6-12 months stick to pre-weaning routine and baby will drop a feed when they are ready. When you start weaning, milk still remains the main source of nutrition for your baby.

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What is baby-led weaning?

Baby-led weaning means offering your baby finger foods only and letting them feed themselves from the start, rather than spoon feeding them puréed or mashed foods. You can offer a range of small, finger-sized pieces of food. Offer finger foods that are safe and easy for your baby to pick up and put to their mouth. This will vary depending on the age of your baby.

Babies, 6-8 months generally use their whole hand to pick up food, closing their hand around a piece of food to hold it. Try offering finger food that is cut up into pieces big enough for your baby to hold in their fist with a bit sticking out (pieces about the size of your own finger work well). Start off with finger foods that break up easily in their mouth and are long enough for them to grip.

Babies, 8-9 months are able to pick up smaller pieces of food, they have usually developed their pincer grasp at this age and use their thumb and forefinger to pick up food and feed themselves.

Some parents prefer baby-led weaning to spoon feeding, while others combine a bit of both. There's no right or wrong way - the most important thing is that your baby eats a wide variety of food and gets all the nutrients they need.

My baby doesn't seem to like anything!

It's important to remember your baby is trying lots of different foods with different textures and tastes. It's perfectly normal if your baby gives you that little look of disgust, pursed lips, a squint or they look like their sucking a lemon, these should not be taken as a sign of dislike.

Instead these are simply the faces some babies make when introduced to new foods and tastes, not because they don't like them. **It may take your baby ten tries or more for them to get used to new foods, flavours and textures.**

There'll be days when they eat more, days when they eat less, and days when they may reject everything. Don't worry, this is perfectly normal, just be patient, keep offering a variety of foods, even the ones they don't seem to like, and let them get used to it in their own time and at their own pace.



Remember your baby might like foods you don't!

Your baby may like foods that you don't so try and be a little adventurous with your weaning choices.

Try different fruit and vegetables or different meats - you might be surprised at what their favourites turn out to be.

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Allergies

It's important to introduce foods that can trigger allergic reactions one at a time, in very small amounts, so that you can spot any reaction. These foods can be introduced from around 6 months as part of your baby's diet, just like any other foods. The following foods should be offered one at a time:

- cows' milk (in cooking or mixed with food).
- eggs (eggs without a red lion stamp should not be eaten raw or lightly cooked).
- foods that contain gluten, including wheat, barley and rye.
- nuts and peanuts (serve them crushed or ground).
- seeds (serve them crushed or ground).
- soya
- shellfish (don't serve raw or lightly cooked).
- fish

Once introduced, and if tolerated, keep offering those foods as part of your baby's usual diet (to minimise the risk of allergy). You can find more information on food allergies and what signs to look out for on the NHS website. www.nhs.uk/baby/weaning

Always speak to your GP or Health Visitor before you start if your baby has any allergies to any food or food ingredients.

Foods to avoid giving to your baby:

- **Sugar** - can cause tooth decay, use fruit, breast or formula milk to sweeten food if needed.
- **Salt** - should never be added to a baby's food it can cause high blood pressure, and isn't good for their kidneys.
- **Nuts** - can cause choking. If there is no history of nut allergies in your family nuts can be introduced once baby is 6 months old, as long as they are crushed or ground into peanut butter.
- **Honey** - occasionally honey contains bacteria that can produce toxins in a baby's intestine, leading to infant botulism. Botulism attacks the nervous system, nerves, brain and spinal cord and can cause paralysis (muscle weakness) should never be given to a baby under 12 months.
- **Low fat foods** - fat is an important source of calories and some vitamins for babies. Better to give babies and young children under 2 years full fat milk, yoghurt and cheese.
- **Raw jelly cubes** - can cause a choking hazard to babies.
- **Saturated fat** - do not give babies too many foods high in saturated fat, such as crisps, cakes and biscuits as in the long term these increase the risk of high cholesterol and heart attacks in later life.
- **Raw or undercooked eggs** - eggs can be given to babies over 6 months as long as the yolks and white are cooked until both are solid.
- **Raw or cooked shellfish**
- **Shark, swordfish and marlin** - as deep water fish may contain mercury.
- **Strawberries, citrus fruits and juices** - can be too acidic for babies under one year.
- **Soft cheeses** - can contain a bacteria called listeria, these include: Mould-ripened soft cheese, such as brie or camembert, Ripened goats' milk cheese, such as chèvre, Soft blue-veined cheese, such as Roquefort
- **Unpasteurised cheeses**: due to the risk of listeria. Check the labels to make sure you're buying cheese made from pasteurised milk.

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How much milk do I give my baby and when:

0-6 Months

Babies only need breast or formula milk. Follow on formula isn't suitable for babies under six months and doesn't need to be introduced after six months.

Types of milk to avoid

Not all milk is suitable for feeding babies. You should never give the following types of milk to a baby under 1 year:

- condensed milk
- evaporated milk
- dried milk
- goats' or sheep's milk (but it's fine to use them when cooking for your baby, as long as they are pasteurised). Goat, sheep and cows milk are not suitable as a drink for babies under one year, as they do not contain the right balance of nutrients, but can be given when over one year as long as pasteurised.
- other types of drinks known as "milks", such as soya, rice, oat or almond drinks.
- cows' milk as a drink (but it's fine to use it in cooking).
- Unsweetened calcium-fortified milk alternatives, such as Soya, almond and oat drinks can be given as part of a healthy balanced diet from the age of one year
- Children under 5 years should not be given rice drinks, because of the levels of arsenic they contain.

Drinking cups for your baby

If you're bottle feeding, it's a good idea to introduce a cup rather than a bottle from about six months.

By the time your baby is one they should have stopped using bottles with teats or they may find it hard to break the habit of comfort sucking on a bottle.

It's important to choose the right kind of beaker or cup. A beaker with a free-flow lid (without a non-spill valve) is better as your baby doesn't have to suck, and learns to drink properly.

As soon as your child is ready encourage them to move from a lidded beaker to drinking from an open cup. You and your baby will find which cup or beaker best suits them, by the age of one year your baby should be drinking from an open cup.



Drinks to avoid

Avoid giving your baby squash or fruit juice.

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Water

Fully breastfed babies don't need any water until they've started eating solid foods. Bottle-fed babies may need some extra water in hot weather.

For babies under six months, use water from the mains tap in the kitchen. You will need to boil then cool the tap water, as it's not sterile straight from the tap. Water for babies over six months doesn't need to be boiled.

Can Babies Drink Bottled Water?

Babies over 6 months can have bottled water, but it should meet the following NHS requirements:

The sodium or Na level should be less than 200mg per litre.

The sulphate or SO or SO₄ content shouldn't be higher than 250mg per litre

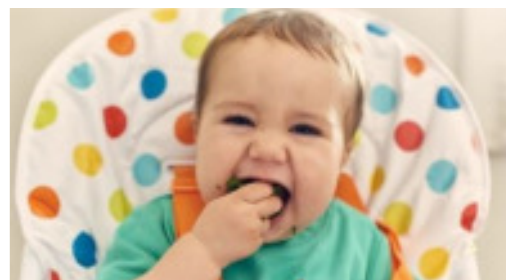
Select low-fluoride versions, most bottled water has an average of 0.11mg of fluoride per litre which is safe for babies over 6 months.

Like tap water, bottle water isn't sterile so it will need to be boiled before you use it to prepare feeds.

Useful first food and weaning websites

There are some great websites that can help you and your baby get off to a flying start with first Here are some of our favourites:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/recipes-and-meal-ideas/>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/solid-foods-weaning/>
- <https://www.emmasdiary.co.uk/baby/starting-solids/>



We really hope you've enjoyed our guide to weaning and introducing first foods. Both you and your baby are learning this new skill together which can take time. Remember to have the camera ready for those funny photographs or your baby 'enjoying' their first foods. Good Luck