

Weaning

Introducing your baby to solid foods

Weaning is a really important step in your child's development. Babies can get all the nutrients they need from breast milk until they are around six months old. Up until this time their digestive system is still developing and it can't yet cope with solid foods.

To begin with, how much your baby takes is less important than getting them used to the idea of eating. They will still be getting most of their nutrition from breast milk, so do not stop. Start off with fruit or vegetable purées and cereals added to milk. Keep feeding your baby breast milk too, but don't give them whole cows' milk as a drink until they are one year old (but you can use it in cooking from six months).

Babies do not need three meals a day to start with, so you can begin by offering foods at a time that suits you both. Gradually, you'll be able to increase the amount and variety of food your baby eats, until they can eventually eat the same as the rest of the family, in smaller portions. It can be great fun to explore new flavours and textures together.

Every baby is an individual, but there are three clear signs (see below) that, together, show your baby is ready for solid foods alongside breast milk or formula. It's very rare for these signs to appear together before your baby is six months old.

Getting started with solid foods

- Always stay with your baby when they are eating in case they start to choke.
- Let your baby enjoy touching food.
- Allow your baby to feed themselves, using their fingers, as soon as they show an interest.
- Do not force your baby to eat, this is a gradual process.
- If you are using a spoon, wait for your baby to open their mouth before you offer the food (do not try to force the food in). Your baby may like to hold a spoon too.
- Start by offering just a few pieces or teaspoons of food, once a day.
- Make sure you cool hot food (and test it before giving it to your baby).
- Do not add salt, sugar or stock cubes to your baby's food or in cooking.

Your local Children's Centres may run activities such as weaning and cooking sessions that can support you.

<http://surestartchildrenscentresnhp.org.uk>

www.childrenscentres.co.uk

First foods - Include mashed or soft cooked fruit and vegetables like parsnip, potato, sweet potato, carrot, apple or pear, all cooled before eating. Soft fruits like peach or melon, or baby rice or baby cereal mixed with your baby's usual milk, are good as well. Do not add salt or sugar.

Finger foods - Finger food is food that is cut up into pieces big enough for your baby to hold. Things like slices of cucumber, carrot, banana or melon cut into pieces about the size of your own finger.

Next foods - Once your baby is used to the idea of more solid foods you can try soft cooked meat such as chicken or mashed fish (check carefully for bones), pasta, noodles, toast or pieces of chapatti, rice and mashed hard-boiled eggs. They can also have full-fat dairy products such as yoghurt, or fromage frais. Choose products with no added sugar or salt, and do not add any yourself. Whole cows' milk can be used in cooking or mixed with food from six months.

Phase out breastfeeding gradually, some babies find it easy to give up and are bored with it, whilst others may take a little longer. Start to offer breast milk after eating, so they are not hungry. Giving up breastfeeding can be an emotional experience. You may feel sad that it's over, but happy to finally get your body back.

Stopping breastfeeding doesn't end the close bond you and your baby have built up.

Cups - Introduce a cup from around six months and offer sips of water with meals. Using an open cup or a free-flow cup without a valve will help your baby learn to sip and is better for their teeth.

For ideas on meals and portion sizes for your child's age and stage visit

www.cwt.org.uk/publications

Guidelines for breakfast, lunch, desserts, snacks, tea.

For more information on portion sizes and for toddler meal ideas you can visit

www.infantandtoddlerforum.org/toddlers-to-preschool/portionsizes

1

They can stay in a sitting position and hold their head steady.

2

They can co-ordinate their eyes, hands and mouth so they can look at the food, pick it up and put it in their mouth, all by themselves.

3

They can swallow food. Babies who are not ready will push their food back out with their tongue, so they get more round their face than they do in their mouths.