



# Weaning and complementary feeding

## Introducing your baby to solid foods

Introducing your baby to solid foods is sometimes called weaning or complementary feeding. It is an important step in your child's development. It can be fun exploring new foods and their textures with your child. This booklet has tips from the children's speech and language therapy team and the children's dietitians.

### What age should we start?

The Department of Health recommend that children should be exclusively breastfed until 6 months of age or 26 weeks. Parents can feed their baby with formula milk.

You may wish to introduce foods earlier than 26 weeks. 4 complete months or 17 weeks is the earliest age for starting weaning. If your child is under 6 months of age and you are thinking about weaning, speak to your health visitor or health care professional.

### What if my child was born early or delayed with their skills?

If your child was born early or has problems with their development, seek advice from your child's medical team before introducing solid foods.

### What does my baby need to be doing first?

Before you start weaning, your child should be able to control their head. They should be able to hold it upright and steady.

Your child will also be starting to co-ordinate their hand and eye movements. You might notice them putting their hands or toys to their mouth.

Your child will also be showing an interest in food. You may notice that they are watching you eating at mealtimes. Looking for these cues from your baby will help you know when they are ready to try tastes of solid foods

You should not introduce lumps and finger foods to your child until after 6 months of age. They are not ready to swallow these types of foods until then. They need to be able to sit upright to manage more textured foods.

### Getting started with weaning

With babies and children who are weaning, we advise the following:

- Always stay with your child when they are eating to reduce the risk of choking.
- Make sure your child is seated in a chair that keeps them upright. This keeps them safe and helps them move their mouth better for eating and drinking
- Start by offering a few spoons of foods once a day
- Your child might not always be interested when you offer food. They might turn their head away or keep their mouth closed. Don't force them to eat. Stop and try another time.
- When you offer your baby the spoon, wait for them to open their mouth. Let them practice holding a spoon too.
- Weaning can be messy! Children get messy hands and faces when practising with solid foods or feeding themselves. They are learning to accept new textures and how to feed themselves. Sometimes it's hard but leave them messy and don't wipe them up until the end of the mealtime or when your child lets you know they want wiping. This helps children learn about the texture of foods.
- Let your child have a go at feeding themselves. This means that they are feeling and touching the food. It helps them learn to accept new textures
- Eat together – children learn through copying others. Sit them with you at mealtimes so they can watch what you do and see you enjoying food
- Did you know; babies may need to try a new food lots of times before they know if they like it. It can take 15-20 different tries. If your child is not sure about a taste, try it again another day.

## What textures will my baby eat and when?

Babies and children are usually ready to move onto solid foods between the ages of 4 - 6 months. Their stomach is ready to manage the food. They can manage more textured foods when they are bigger and have developed new skills.

There are age and stages when you might try your child with new food textures. Some children take time to move onto the next stage so follow their lead.

Stage	Age range	Texture	Food	Babies usually
	4 - 6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Milk</li> <li>• Smooth puree</li> <li>• semi- solid foods</li> </ul>	Breast milk or formula.  Small tastes of fruit, vegetables, baby rice or cereal for practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold their head</li> <li>• But they need lots of support to sit</li> <li>• Bring things to their mouth</li> </ul>
1	6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thicker puree and mashed foods</li> <li>• Foods may have some soft lumps</li> <li>• Soft finger foods</li> </ul>	Fruit and vegetables.  Meat, fish, pulses and eggs.  Rice, pasta, potatoes bread and cereals.  Yoghurt, custard and cheese.  Nuts* (as smooth paste only - like peanut butter).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sit upright in a supported chair</li> <li>• Hold and bang spoon</li> <li>• Experiment with a cup – but they will spill lots!</li> </ul>
2	7 - 9 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soft lumps</li> <li>• Mashed and minced consistency foods</li> <li>• More finger foods</li> </ul>	Fruit and vegetables.  Meat, fish, pulses and eggs.  Rice, pasta, potatoes bread and cereals.  Yoghurt, custard and cheese.  Nuts* (as smooth paste only - like peanut butter).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach for food</li> <li>• Pick up food and put to their mouth</li> <li>• Bite and 'munch' foods</li> </ul>
3	9 - 12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mashed foods</li> <li>• Chopped family foods which can be held in the hand</li> </ul>	Fruit and vegetables.  Meat, fish, pulses and eggs.  Rice, pasta, potatoes, bread and cereals.  Yoghurt, custard and cheese.  Nuts* (as smooth paste only - like peanut butter).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try using a spoon to feed themselves – but they're messy!</li> <li>• Move their tongue from side to side</li> <li>• Chew some family foods but not hard foods yet.</li> </ul>

**Salt and sugar:** Do not add salt and sugar to foods. Limit any foods you offer which have a high salt content (like salty meat, cheese and processed foods).

**Nuts\*:** Do not give whole nuts to children under the age of 5 years. This is because whole nuts are a choking hazard. You can introduce nuts if they are ground down or in pastes (smooth peanut butter). If there is a family history of allergy speak to your GP or health professional before introducing nuts.

**Honey:** Avoid honey before the age of 12 months. It can contain bacteria which could harm your baby.

**Gluten:** There is now no need to avoid gluten in your baby's diet. Gluten can be introduced into the diet from 4 complete months of age.

## What if my baby gags on food?

When babies first start weaning or start to move to different textures, you may notice that they gag. This is usually because they are not used to how the food feels. They may not be ready and need more time to explore and touch the food. Give your baby time to play and explore the foods and introduce new foods gradually.

If you are worried that your child is gagging or choking on foods, contact your health visitor or doctor.

## How much should my baby be eating and drinking?

### *Milk and drinks*

Children should have breast milk or infant formula as their main milk until they are over the age of 1. As they begin to eat more food they will take less milk although milk still remains an important source of nutrition for babies.

Breast-fed babies do not need any additional drinks but formula-fed babies may need some extra water, especially in hot weather.

Water is the best drink to offer. Use tap water. This should be boiled and cooled for babies under 6 months. Bottled mineral waters are not recommended. They can be too high in some minerals for babies.

There is no need to offer babies drinks of juice; even natural juices contain sugars and can still cause tooth decay. If juices are offered they should be well-diluted and offered from an open cup, or cup with a free-flowing spout, after a meal.

Caffeine-containing drinks are not recommended for children. Young children should not be given drinks of tea as the tannins in tea can interfere with the absorption of iron from food.

As your child gets bigger, it can be tricky to balance giving solid food with how much milk your child should have. If they are full with milk, they will not be motivated to have food.

### **As a general guide:**

- 6 – 12 months: 500 – 600ml (1 pint) of milk a day. Babies who are breast fed or who are drinking less than 500ml formula a day should be given children's vitamin drops containing vitamins A, C and D.
- 1 – 4 years: From 1 year, children can have full-fat cow's milk to replace formula. Semi skimmed milk can be introduced from 2 years old if they are eating and growing well. Breast feeding can continue for as long as mum and baby are enjoying it. Your baby needs a minimum of 300ml (1/2 pint) every day to make sure they have enough calcium for the development of strong bones. Offering more than 500ml (1 pint) daily will reduce their appetite for food.

Some children start to refuse milk once they are eating solids. Add milk to foods in cooking or offer cheese or yoghurts to help them with calcium intake.

All children from the age of 1 year up to 5 years should be offered children's vitamin drops containing vitamins A, C and D.

- Above 1 year: 6 – 8 drinks per day helps your child keep hydrated. This amount includes their milk drink. It is important that children drink enough liquid to keep hydrated. However, too much of milk, dilute juice/water can mean they want less food. Offer drinks with snacks and after a meal, not immediately before or during a meal.



## Food

When you first start to wean your baby, they may only take a small amount of food. This is okay. They are practising having food. They still get most of their nutrition from breast milk or infant formula.

To start with, babies do not have 3 meals a day. You can offer foods when you have time together to practise. As children increase the amount of food they eat, they can have 3 meals a day but smaller portions.

There are no set portion sizes for babies and children, every baby is different. Babies and children only have tiny stomachs so smaller more frequent meals and snacks may be better whilst they are still little. Let them lead the mealtime. Children can regulate their appetite. They stop eating when they are full. It is important to follow their cues. Try to recognise when your child is full. They may turn their head away and keep their mouth shut. They may push the spoon away.

### Portion size tips for 3 meals a day:

- Start with small portions. Your child can always ask for more.
- Use your child's palm/fist size to help you with portion sizes. For example, for dinner your child could have a fist sized amount of mashed potato plus a palm sized amount of meat and vegetable portion. For pudding your child could have a fist sized amount of banana to hold.
- Children may not always finish the food on their plate. Do not force them to finish the food. Keep the mealtime positive.
- Offer water in a cup at mealtimes. Offer milk separately from mealtimes.
- If your child can sit upright, they can practise drinking from an open cup. They would need a grown up to help.
- Some parents may use free flow cups with a lid and a spout. Avoid offering a bottle at mealtimes.
- You may find your child has lots to eat some days less on other days. This is normal. What your child eats over the period of a week is more important than what they might eat in just one day. Children are still learning to control how much they eat and when. Provided your child is growing and gaining weight adequately then they are probably eating enough.
- If you are concerned about the amount your child eats and drinks, speak to your GP or health visitor. Try keeping a diary of what your child is eating and drinking and how much, to show to them.

Introducing weaning to your child is an important stage in their development. It is also a fun one. Keep mealtimes a positive experience to help your child build a positive relationship with food.

### For more information about weaning visit:

- NHS Choices: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

If you are concerned that your child is not managing solid food, contact your health visitor or GP. You can also contact:

- Speech and language therapy – if you or a professional are worried about your child's swallowing [swy-tr.barnsleyspeechtherapy@nhs.net](mailto:swy-tr.barnsleyspeechtherapy@nhs.net)
- Dietitians – if you or a professional are worried about your child's weight and growth – speak to your child's GP or health visitor. They may need to do a referral to the children's dietetic service.

The content of this leaflet has been written by children's speech and language therapy and children's dietetic service.

#### Your feedback is welcome

We invite you to share any comments, compliments, concerns or complaints you have about the Trust.

Please speak to a member of staff or contact our customer services team on 0800 587 2108 who can also provide help in understanding this information.