

Weaning

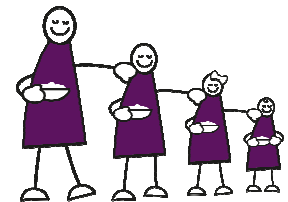


From 6 months - Introducing first foods

Introducing your baby to solid foods, often called weaning onto foods, should start when your baby is around six months old. It is a really important step in your baby's development and can be great fun to explore new flavours and textures together.

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 breastmilk or infant formula. Babies don't need three meals a day to start with, so you can start 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.



Why it pays to wait until they are ready

Research shows that babies need nothing but breast milk or infant formula for the first six months of life. This gives a baby's digestive system time to develop so that they cope fully with solid foods. This includes solid foods made into purees and cereals mixed with milk.

If you are breastfeeding, feeding only your milk up to around six months will give them extra protection against infection, and it will continue to protect them for as long as you carry on.

Whether your baby has breast milk or infant formula, waiting until your baby is ready for food will save a lot of time too, as they will quickly be able to feed themselves and with less mess, as they will be able to swallow properly.

Offer breast milk or infant formula. 'Follow on' formula is not suitable for babies under six months.

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Three signs your baby is ready for their first food

Every baby is an individual, but there are three clear signs which, together, show your baby is ready for solid foods along side breast milk or infant formula. It is very rare for these signs to appear together before your baby is six months old.

1. They can stay in a sitting position and hold their head steady.
2. They can co-ordinate their eyes, hands and mouth so that 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, so they get more round their face than they do in their mouths.

Some signs that can be mistaken for a baby being ready for solid foods:

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

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

Introducing solid foods before six months: if after checking with your health visitor or doctor, you decide to introduce solid foods before six months, you should avoid giving your baby certain foods as they may cause food allergies or make your baby ill. These include foods that contain wheat, gluten, nuts, peanuts, peanut products, seeds, liver, eggs, fish, shellfish, cow's milk and soft or unpasteurised cheese.



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Getting started

- Always stay with your baby when they are eating in case they start to choke.
- Let your baby enjoy touching and holding the food.
- Allow your baby to feed themselves, using their fingers, as soon as they show an interest.
- Don't force your baby, wait until the next time if they are not interested this time.
- If you are using a spoon, wait for your baby to open their mouth before you offer the food. Your baby may like to hold a spoon too.
- Start by offering just a few pieces or teaspoons of food, once a day.
- Cool hot food and test it before giving it to your baby.
- Don't add salt, sugar or stock cubes to your baby's food or cooking water.

Tips on what foods to give your baby as they grow

First Foods

Your baby's first foods can include mashed or soft cooked fruit and vegetables like parsnip, potato, yam, sweet potato, carrot, apple or pear, all cooled before eating. Or soft fruit like peach, melon, soft ripe banana or avocado as finger foods or mashed. Or baby rice or baby cereal mixed with your baby's usual milk.

When you start introducing solids (weaning), introduce the foods that commonly cause allergies one at a time so that you can spot any reaction. These foods are:

- milk
- eggs
- wheat
- nuts
- seeds
- fish and shellfish

Do not introduce any of these foods before six months. See our fact sheet on foods to avoid during weaning.

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Next Foods

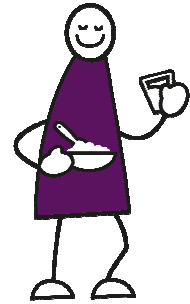
Soft cooked meat such as chicken, mashed fish (check very carefully for any bones), pasta, noodles, toast, pieces of chapatti, lentils, rice and mashed hard boiled eggs. Also full fat dairy products such as yoghurt, fromage frais or custard (choose products with no added sugar or less sugar). Whole cow's milk can be used in cooking or mixed with food from six months.

Drinks

Keep feeding your baby breast milk or infant formula as well but do not give them whole cow's milk as a drink until they are a year old.

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 your baby's teeth.

Offer only milk or water to drink. We recommend not offering any juice type of drink to children less than five years. Offering juice at this stage will encourage a sweet tooth and is not good for milk teeth.



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