
After Milk What Next?

A guide for introducing
solid foods for parents
and caregivers



When should I introduce solid foods to my baby?

Breast feeding is important for the development and maturity of the immune system. The Department of Health recommends exclusive breast feeding for around the first 6 months of life followed by continued breast feeding alongside starting complementary foods (formerly known as weaning). All mothers should be supported to breast feed as long as they are able to.

Introducing solid foods

At around 6 months of age, babies are ready to move onto solid foods. Your baby will begin to show signs that they are ready for solids. These include:

- Wants to chew and is practising with toys
- Can sit up with some or no support
- Able to support their head
- Can reach out and grab for things, bringing them to their mouth

The following behaviours can be mistaken for signs of being ready for solid foods:

- Putting fists in mouth
- Higher demand for milk feeds
- Waking up more than usual during the night

It is important to note that there is wide individual variation and some babies may require complementary foods around 20 weeks but not before 17 weeks.

Introducing solid foods is an important step in your baby's development. By introducing solid food babies learn to:

- Take food from a spoon
- Self-feed using their hands and a spoon
- Move food from the front to the back of the mouth for swallowing
- Learn to chew
- Sip from a cup

It is an enjoyable stage for you and your baby to enjoy together

For healthy preterm babies, complementary feeding should be based on the readiness signs listed above and should not commence before 4 months from their estimated due date; once they start they can progress as for full term babies.



What should I give?

Start with a little baby cereal mixed with breast milk or formula milk. You can also try some puréed or well-mashed vegetables or fruit, for example potato, sweet potato, carrot, apple, avocado, banana or pear. Next, introduce foods such as meat, lentils, rice and full-fat yoghurt. Aim to offer a range of the healthy foods from each of the following food groups:

- Fruit and vegetables
- Potatoes and cereal based foods including bread, rice, pasta, porridge, breakfast cereals with no added salt/sugar and avoid very high fibre/bran varieties
- Well cooked beans, lentils, peas, meat, fish and eggs
- Dairy foods such as yoghurt, cheese, custard and milk puddings



Offer a mix of puréed/mashed foods and finger foods. Expressed breast or formula milk can be used to thin down the mashed or puréed food if necessary.

Top tips

It is easier to introduce new foods at this age so it is important to make the most of this by giving a variety of foods now, as this can become a challenge when they are older.

Foods to avoid in babies and young children

- Honey (under 12 months)
- Shark, swordfish and marlin
- Unpasteurised dairy products

Ensure all eggs, meat, fish and shellfish given to babies are well cooked.

Getting started

Each baby is different when it comes to feeding

It is important you learn to understand your baby's cues so that you can correctly interpret their hunger signals. Once this is recognised, respond with affection and a consistent manner that is supportive and developmentally appropriate. This will allow your baby to be reassured that their hunger signal provides a predictable response. Ensure the environment is pleasant with minimal distractions, and that your baby is sitting comfortably. Be guided by your baby. If you need further help with feeding, contact your health visitor.



Food preparation

- Always wash your hands well before preparing food
 - Keep surfaces clean where food is eaten and prepared
- Thoroughly wash and dry all equipment used in hot soapy water

What about a vegetarian weaning diet?

include foods rich in iron such as fortified breakfast cereals with no added sugar/salt, eggs, beans, lentils, tofu and green leafy vegetables. Give foods high in vitamin C with these foods, for example tomatoes, bell peppers, leafy vegetables, oranges, mango, kiwi fruit or strawberries. Make sure you offer at least 2 servings of iron-rich foods daily.

After 12 months, pure unsweetened fruit juice high in vitamin C can be offered if diluted. Remember to dilute pure unsweetened fruit juice one part juice to 10 parts water for infants; after 2 years this can be changed to one part juice to one part water (up to 1 small portion (125ml)).



What should I do if my baby will not eat?



We all have 'off days' and so do babies. It is normal for babies to pull faces when trying a new food but this doesn't mean they don't like it and is more so a reaction to a new taste.

Do not force your baby to eat. If solids are refused, take the food away and give the usual milk feed. As a parent or caregiver it is important to recognise signals of when babies are hungry or full up to reduce the risk of over feeding or force feeding. Babies commonly need repeated exposure to new foods before they will accept them, particularly if they have bitter or sour taste. They may also be more reluctant to take savoury rather than bland or naturally sweet tasting foods.

Speak to your health visitor or family doctor to find out more about this.

What about food allergies?

The foods most likely to cause food allergies are cows milk, eggs, peanuts, other nuts, soy, wheat, fish and shellfish. If there is a history of allergy in the family introduce these foods one at a time in small amounts. Food allergies are not

common, but if you think your baby is reacting to food, go to your family doctor or health visitor. If you are advised to exclude foods from your baby's diet, your family doctor should refer you to a paediatric dietitian.

Do not give whole nuts, including peanuts, to children under 5 years of age as they may cause choking. Use nut butter and ground nuts mixed in food'.

Delaying introduction of any of these foods unnecessarily may increase later risk of allergies to the same foods. Where babies are identified as high risk to developing food allergies, parents and carers should take advice from their baby's health care team. The joint early feeding guidance from the British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology and the BDA Food Allergy Specialist group should be followed for these infants.

