

Starting Solid Foods

Starting your baby on solid foods, also known as weaning or complementary feeding, starts when your baby is around 6 months of age.

Why does my baby need to start solid foods?

Until around 6 months, breast milk or formula milk provide everything that your baby needs. At around 6 months, your baby's stores of some nutrients, such as iron, begin to run out so solid foods need to be started.

Why should I wait until around 6 months?

By around 6 months, your baby's digestive system will have developed to be able to cope with solid foods. They will also be better able to move food around their mouth, chew and swallow and be able to feed themselves. If you are thinking of starting solid foods earlier, please check with your Health Visitor or GP first.

Signs that your baby is ready for solid foods

- Can sit up and hold their head steady
- Have hand, eye and mouth co-ordination so they can pick up food and put it in their mouths
- Able to swallow food



How to start solid foods

From 6 months

Start by offering your baby small amounts of soft cooked vegetables like carrot, sweet potato, yam or parsnip. Soft fruit like banana, pear, peach or melon are also good or try baby

rice mixed with your baby's usual milk. To make a purée, put the cooked vegetables or soft fruit through a sieve or use a hand blender to purée until smooth, then mix with a small amount of your baby's usual milk.

Once your baby is used to purées, they can try finger foods like chunks of fruit or vegetables, unsalted or unsweetened rice cakes, sticks of cheese, toast, chapati or pitta. Finger foods should be the size of your baby's fist with a bit poking out the top.

At this stage, your baby should be getting small tastes of a variety of different foods to get used to eating. Some babies will happily start on finger foods only, known as baby-led weaning, while other babies will prefer starting with purées before progressing to lumpier textures. It can take up to 10 tries or more before your baby will accept new foods, tastes or textures so keep trying new foods.

Keep breastfeeding or feeding with formula milk as well. From 6 months, you can offer sips of water in a cup with meals.

Next steps

Whole cows' milk can now be added to food and used in cooking. You can also introduce full-fat dairy products such as yoghurt or cheese. Try soft cooked meat such as chicken, mashed fish (remove bones), toast, noodles, pasta, rice, lentils, chapati and hard-boiled eggs.

From 7-9 months

Your baby will now be moving towards having 3 meals a day which will be a mixture of mashed, chopped and finger foods, as well as their usual milk feeds.

Gradually increase the amount and the variety of foods that you give to your baby to ensure that they get all of the energy and nutrients that they need.

Your baby should be eating a wide range of the following foods:

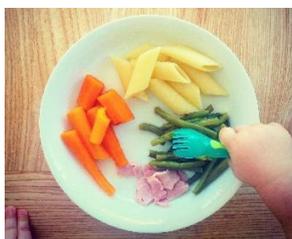
- Fruit and vegetables
- Potatoes, bread, pasta, rice and other starchy foods
- Meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses and other non-dairy sources of protein
- Full-fat dairy products such as cheese and plain yoghurt

From 10-12 months

Lunch and tea can now include a pudding such as fruit or unsweetened yoghurt. It is important to eat your meals together to encourage your baby to develop good eating habits.

From 12 months

At 12 months, your baby will be eating 3 meals a day plus snacks. They will be eating the same meals as the rest of the family but smaller portions. Your baby can now have whole cows' milk as a drink.



Homemade food

Baby food in jars, packets or pouches can be convenient but is also expensive and has got a similar texture. If your baby gets used to this, it can stop them liking homemade food. Therefore jars, packets or pouches should be limited to trips out or for busy days.

References

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3. NHS (2020) Weaning and solid foods. Available: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/solid-foods-weaning/?tabname=babies-and-toddlers>
4. NHS (2020) Start4Life. What is weaning? Available: <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/>
5. SACN (2018) Feeding in the first year of life. Available: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/725530/SACN_report_on_Feeding_in_the_First_Year_of_Life.pdf
6. Food Standards Agency (2017) New advice on eating runny eggs. Available: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20171207160203/https://www.food.gov.uk/news-updates/news/2017/16597/new-advice-on-eating-runny-eggs>

Food issues to be aware of

- **Salt** should not be added to home-cooked food as your baby's kidneys can't cope with salt.
- **Sugar** should not be added to sweeten foods and you should avoid giving foods or drinks containing added sugars as frequent consumption of these can lead to tooth decay.
- **Eggs** stamped with the British Lion are safe to eat runny. Other eggs should be hard-boiled.
- **Nuts** should not be given whole until 5 years of age due to the risk of choking. Crushed or ground nuts and peanut butter or other nut butters are fine to give from 6 months.
- **Honey** can contain bacteria which can make babies ill so should not be given until 1 year old.
- **Raw shellfish** should be avoided to reduce the risk of food poisoning.
- **Shark, swordfish or marlin** should be avoided due to their high mercury content.
- **Small, round foods** like grapes should be cut in half lengthways to reduce the risk of choking.

Food allergies

There are some foods that may cause an allergic reaction in some babies so these foods should be introduced one at a time so potential allergies can be spotted. These foods include cows' milk, eggs, foods containing gluten including wheat, barley and rye, nuts, peanuts, peanut products, seeds, soya, fish and shellfish.