

Introducing your baby to solid foods

Giving your baby more than just milk

When your baby is around six months old, they will be ready to have some solid food alongside breast milk or infant formula. From around six months old, infants will need other sources of nutrition to help them grow and develop.

Introducing solids is a gradual process. Each child is different and it is important to go at your baby's pace.

At the age of one year, most children will be eating 3 meals a day and 2-3 nutritious snacks. These should include a wide variety of homemade foods, textures and flavours similar to the rest of the family.



Ready or not?

Lots of families wonder when to start introducing solid foods with so much conflicting advice available. Most babies are ready to start solid foods at around 6 months of age. If you feel your baby might be ready for solids earlier than this, have a chat with your Health Visitor who can guide you. Chewing fists, wanting more milk feeds and waking in the night more than usual can be mistaken for signs of being ready for solids. There are 3 clear signs, which when they appear together around 6 months, show that your baby is ready. They can:

- Stay in a sitting position, holding their head steady.
- Co-ordinate their eyes, hands and mouth so they can look at their food, pick it up and put it in their mouth.
- Swallow food.

If your baby was born prematurely ask your Health Visitor about when to start.

How much do they need to eat?

Let your baby guide you on how much food they need. Stop when your baby shows you they have had enough. If they turn away, clamp their mouth shut or aren't interested, don't force them to finish their food.

As your baby gradually starts to eat more solids, the amount of milk they drink will go down.

Getting started

Choose a time when your baby is calm, alert and not too tired or hungry. Start by offering food once a day and as your baby gets used to eating larger quantities, a second and then third meal can be introduced.

First foods can be purees, mashes and/or soft finger foods. At around 6 months, many infants will manage mashes and soft finger foods straight away. If babies are given purees, it's important that they move on to lumpier textures as soon as they are ready. Foods should gradually become less mashed and at around 10-12 months, chopped up family meals can be given.

Include a variety of tastes and textures and plenty of savoury and bitter flavours. Include vegetables that are not so sweet such as cauliflower, broccoli and spinach.



Remember that eating involves brand new skills to learn! Some spitting out is normal and does not always mean your child does not like that food.

The table on the next page gives an overview of the types of foods that can be offered.

A guide to introducing your baby to solid food

Age	Textures to introduce	Foods to introduce
<p>First Foods Around 6 months</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purees • Mashed foods • Soft finger foods <p>Skills to learn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking food from a spoon • Moving food from the front of the mouth to the back of the mouth for swallowing • Managing thicker purees, mashed foods and soft finger foods • Drinking from a beaker or cup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft cooked vegetables e.g. broccoli, parsnip, sweet potato, yam, carrot, courgette • Soft fruits e.g. banana, peach, avocado, cooked apple, pear • Soft cooked lentils and beans • Porridge, soft cooked rice, baby rice, ground rice, maize, millet • Plain full fat yogurt, cream cheese, cottage cheese • Potatoes <p>Include foods that contain iron every day:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red meat (beef, lamb, pork) • Green vegetables (e.g. broccoli, peas, kale) • Oily fish (e.g. salmon, mackerel, kippers, pilchards, trout) • Eggs • Beans, lentils and pulses • Iron fortified cereals, low in salt and sugar (e.g. some brands of wheatbisks and unsweetened ready oats). • Smooth nut butters and ground nuts <p>Drinks – Plain water or breast milk or infant formula</p>
<p>Next Steps Around 7-9 months Increasing variety, textures and tastes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minced and mashed foods with soft lumps • Finger foods <p>Skills to learn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving lumps around mouth • Chewing lumps • Finger feeding • Drinking from a cup • Having a go at self-feeding with a spoon 	<p>Aim for three meals a day</p> <p>Increase the variety of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit and vegetables; including ones with bitter flavours e.g. broccoli, cauliflower, spinach, cabbage, green beans • Beans, pulses (e.g lentils, dhal, hummus), fish, eggs, meat, smooth nut butters. • Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta, and other starchy foods (e.g low sugar, low salt cereals, couscous, chapatti, yam, oats) • Full fat dairy or unsweetened, fortified alternatives e.g. milk, cheese, yoghurt, fromaige frais <p>Drinks – Plain water or breast milk or infant formula</p>

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<p>Moving on</p> <p>Around 10 -12 months</p> <p>Baby should be eating mostly the same homemade nutritious food as the whole family.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chopped family foods • Harder finger foods <p>Skills to learn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chewing minced and chopped foods • Attempting to self-feed with a spoon • Drinking from a cup 	<p>Aim for 3 meals a day</p> <p>2-3 nutritious snacks can gradually be introduced by around 12 months depending on your baby's appetite</p> <p>Include a wide variety of foods from the four main food groups:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fruit and vegetables 2. Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat, smooth nut butters 3. Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy foods 4. Full fat dairy or unsweetened, fortified alternatives <p>Drinks – Plain water or breast milk or infant formula</p>

A supplement containing vitamins A, C and D is recommended for all children from 6 months to 5 years (unless drinking more than 500mls formula milk a day). Breast fed babies should be given a vitamin D supplement from birth. Speak to your Health Visitor or Community Pharmacist for more information.

Visit www.healthystart.nhs.uk to find out if you could be eligible for free Healthy Start vitamins (and food vouchers too!).

Vegetarian and vegan diets

Some families may choose to feed their baby a vegetarian diet. It is important to offer your baby a variety of foods from the different food groups to make sure they get all the nutrients they need. Ask your Health Visitor for a copy of the advice sheet 'feeding your baby a vegetarian diet'. If you are thinking of feeding your baby a vegan diet ask to be referred to a paediatric dietitian.

Milk

- Cow's milk can be used in small amounts for cooking when making family foods for your baby and it can be introduced as your baby's main drink from 12 months.
- Breastfeeding can continue for as long as mother and baby want to.
- From 12 months, infant formula milk is no longer needed (unless recommended by a health professional). 'Follow-on', 'toddler' and 'growing up' milks are unnecessary.
- From 12 months, 3 servings of dairy foods a day will ensure enough calcium. Giving your toddler too much milk can fill them up and reduce their appetite at mealtimes.

Foods and allergies

Many families worry about giving their baby foods that could trigger an allergy. These are often called 'allergenic foods' and include: cows' milk products, eggs, fish, shellfish, soya, nuts, peanuts, seeds, wheat and gluten containing foods. When you start giving solids, introduce allergenic foods, one at a time (one every 2-3 days) and in small amounts. This is so that you can spot any reaction. Once introduced and if tolerated, keep offering these foods regularly as part of your baby's usual diet (to help reduce the chance of them developing an allergy to that food).

Signs of a food allergy (can include one or more of the following reactions):

- diarrhoea or vomiting
- a cough
- wheezing or shortness of breath
- itchy throat and tongue
- itchy skin or rash
- swollen lips and throat
- runny or blocked nose
- sore, red and itchy eyes

If your child shows any of these symptoms, talk to your GP or Health Visitor. If you think your baby is having a severe allergic reaction, always call 999.

Foods to limit or avoid

What to limit or avoid	Why?
<p>Don't add salt to your baby's food. This includes stock cubes and gravy granules</p> <p>Processed foods should not be given e.g. bacon, pasta sauces, soups, pasties</p> <p>Salty snack foods should not be given e.g. crisps</p>	<p>Baby's kidney's cannot cope with too much salt</p>
<p>Sugar should not be added to foods for your baby</p> <p>Babies don't need sweet foods such as chocolate, sweets, biscuits, cakes and pastries. These are high in sugar and fat</p> <p>Dried fruit – keep to mealtimes only</p> <p>Pure fruit juices – the only drinks your baby needs are plain water and breast milk or infant formula milk. If you do give your baby fruit juices it's important to dilute these well with water and serve in a cup at mealtimes only.</p> <p>Other drinks containing sugar or sweetener are not needed e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juice drinks, fizzy drinks, sugary drinks, squashes, flavoured milks and waters • Drinks with sweeteners, diet or low calorie drinks • Baby drinks, herbal teas • Tea and coffee 	<p>Sugary foods and drinks (including syrup, honey and nectars) can lead to tooth decay</p> <p>Babies can fill up on these foods and drinks and reduce their appetite for more nutritious foods</p> <p>Babies need to learn to like a variety of tastes not just sweet</p> <p>Affects iron absorption and contains caffeine</p>
<p>Honey should be avoided for the first year</p>	<p>May contain bacteria which can cause botulism. Honey is a form of sugar and can damage teeth</p>
<p>Whole nuts shouldn't be given to under 5's. Smooth nut butters or finely ground nuts can be given when introducing solid foods – look for lower salt brands.</p>	<p>Whole nuts can cause choking</p>
<p>Shark, swordfish or marlin should be avoided for the first year</p>	<p>Contain mercury- can affect a baby's growing nervous system</p>
<p>Raw shell fish should be avoided for the first year</p>	<p>Risk of food poisoning</p>
<p>Rice drinks are not suitable as a main drink for under 5's</p>	<p>May contain too much arsenic</p>
<p>Baby pouches should be limited. Sucking purées directly from pouches can damage children's teeth. It's good for babies to be able to see, smell and touch the food they're eating. Offering your baby homemade foods rather than pouches, packets and jars will help them enjoy a wide range of flavours and be less fussy with food later on!</p>	<p>Often more expensive, less nutritious and higher in sugar than homemade foods</p>

Top Tips!

- **Enjoy it.** Introducing foods should be a fun and enjoyable experience for both you and your baby.
- **Go at your baby's pace.** All babies are different and will progress at their own rate.
- **Stay with them.** Always stay with your little one when they are eating to make sure they don't choke. Babies need to be alert, in a sitting position and facing forward when offered food. Use a highchair with a broad, stable base and make sure they are safely strapped in.
- **Reward your baby with smiles and cuddles rather than food.** Using food as a reward or to manage children's behaviour encourages children to eat when they're not hungry.
- **Let your baby feed themselves.** Encourage your baby to self-feed from the start. Allow them to hold a spoon and offer soft finger foods.
- **They may just like it.** If you don't like a food, it is still important to try it with your baby - you never know, they might like it!
- **Get messy!** Playing with food and being messy with food is normal. It's the way babies learn about new things. Some parents find a large, cheap, plastic table cloth useful for covering the floor. Try not to wipe your baby's face or hands until the end of the meal.
- **Eat together.** Show them that you like eating lots of different healthy foods too. They love to watch and copy others. Try to keep mealtimes free from TV and screens.
- **Try to be patient and stay calm.** If your baby refuses a food, remove it without fuss and try it again another day. Give attention and praise when they are eating well or trying new foods. Try to ignore any fussy behavior.
- **Homemade family foods.** Offer the same nutritious homemade foods for the whole family – mash/chop/blend as needed and don't add salt or sugar for baby.
- **Give me time to like new foods.** Sometimes you need to offer a food 10-15 times before your baby will like it. Try the same food in a different way another day e.g. mashed broccoli, broccoli finger food, cheesy broccoli and potato.
- **Remember to smile.** Your baby looks to you for reassurance.
- **Babies like strong flavours.** Try using, herbs, onions, garlic or mild spices.

More Top Tips!

- **Don't get stuck on puree.** Move on from puree and smooth mashes as soon as your baby is ready.
- **Offer finger foods.** Many babies prefer to feed themselves. Finger foods help develop biting and chewing skills.
- **Gagging.** Many babies gag and spit when eating, which is usually a normal part of learning how to eat. Calmly reassure your baby. Speak to your Health Visitor about the difference between gagging and choking.
- **Let them decide how much to eat.** Offer healthy meals and snacks and let them decide how much to eat. Let your baby tell you when they've had enough - don't force them to finish it all.
- **They may not always want to finish a bottle or food.** Just like you, your baby's appetite can vary from day to day.

For more information about feeding your baby speak to your Health Visitor or Community Nursery Nurse.

For tips, recipes and meal ideas visit:

www.everychildwales.co.uk
www.firststepsnutrition.org
www.nhs.uk/start4life



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