

# Milk & More

## Starting your baby on solid foods



**Breastmilk or first infant formula** is the **best source of all** the food and fluid your baby needs in the **first six months of life**. If you are breastfeeding, continuing to breastfeed gives your baby extra protection against illness, as well as food, for as long as you carry on breastfeeding. It's good for you too.

At around six months, babies develop the skills they need for managing solid foods. Waiting till your baby shows they are ready for solids will make it easier and more enjoyable for you and them. Introducing anything else earlier means the baby may take less milk and not get all the nutrients they need. If your baby was born early, wait until you see the same signs.

**The three signs to look for** are that they can:

- Sit up with minimal support and hold their head steady, *and*
- Coordinate eyes, hands and mouth so they can look at food, pick it up and put it in their mouth and make munching movements, *and*
- Swallow some food, rather than pushing it back out

# STARTING YOUR BABY ON SOLID FOODS: GUIDE FOR THE FIRST YEAR AND BEYOND

Remember that every baby is different, so follow their cues and go at their pace. Like us, they will be more interested one time than another.

	When all 3 signs of readiness are seen, usually around 6 months	Around 7-9 months	Around 10-12 months	By 12 months
<b>When?</b>	Choose a time of day when your baby shows an interest in food (maybe when you are eating yourself) and they are not too tired or hungry. Offer foods after or between milk feeds.	Offer solid foods before the milk feed – otherwise they can fill up on milk and not want to try solid foods.	Babies will eat more solid food and start to reduce their milk intake.	Begin to have set meal and snack times.
<b>What to give?</b>	<b>Begin offering first tastes of solid foods</b> Carry on breast or bottle feeding responsively as before – baby will still get most of their nutrients from milk in the beginning. Offer a combination of finger foods and soft mashed foods (on a spoon or for babies to pick up with their fingers). Offer some sticks of soft raw or cooked vegetables for your baby to scoop up with their hand. At first they will only chew on what pokes out of the top of their fist. Starting with savoury vegetables (such as broccoli) rather than fruit helps your baby accept foods that are less sweet. After a few days, begin offering other foods from the 4 main food groups, such as starchy foods (eg potato, pasta, sticky rice), protein foods (eg lentils, fish, eggs, chicken, meat), dairy foods (eg mild cheese, plain full-fat yogurt), with vegetables and fruit. Finger-shaped pieces work best. Home-cooked food is usually cheaper, tastier, more varied and nutritious than shop-bought baby food. Avoid using pouches of baby food, baby snacks and drinks/juices.	<b>Increase tastes and textures</b> Keep offering a variety of foods from all the food groups, even the ones they don't seem to like. Let them get used to it in their own time. Offer the same foods the family are eating (no added salt). Babies will still take breast or formula feeds responsively. As they take more solid foods, your baby will take less milk. Offer small amount of tap water in a free-flowing cup. No other drinks are necessary. By this time, babies can cope with lightly mashed or chopped food and firmer finger foods. Avoid whole nuts and make sure any round foods (eg tomatoes, grapes, sausages) are cut up to reduce risk of choking.	<b>Healthy family foods</b> Can manage healthy family foods of adult consistency (cut up into smaller pieces, if needed). Avoid adding salt and sugar when cooking – salt isn't good for their kidneys and sugar causes tooth decay. (You can add it for yourself afterwards, if desired.) Continue to offer tap water in a cup.	<b>Enjoying full range of tastes and textures</b> Breastmilk – for as long as you and your child wish. Formula, follow-on or toddler milks are not needed. As a drink, offer full-fat cow's milk or tap water in a free-flow cup. Avoid other drinks.
<b>How often and how much?</b>	At first they may take only a few bites or a teaspoon or two once a day. After a week or two, you can offer twice a day. Follow your baby's signals for when they have had enough – like turning their head away, pushing food away, closing their mouth.	Move towards offering food three times a day. Babies under 12 months do not need snacks. Don't worry about portion size – your baby will eat more on some days and less on others. Healthy babies know how much they need to eat.	Offer three meals a day in addition to their milk feeds. Start with smaller portions and let them ask for more, if they want.	Offer three meals and two healthy snacks spread over a day. Praise your child for eating, not for finishing their plate.
<b>What else?</b>	Your baby learns by touching food and exploring tastes and textures. Encourage them to be involved in feeding themselves from the start, even if it's messy! Babies may need to try a new food 10-20 times before accepting it. At first they may spit it out or make funny faces – it doesn't mean they don't like the food, it is just new to them. Try offering it with a familiar food. Sit them up to eat and always stay with them when eating. Include them in family mealtimes, as babies will learn from the social interaction and watching others eat.	Your baby will start to pick up smaller pieces of food between their thumb and forefinger. Your baby may want to have a go with cutlery, like stabbing food with a fork or scooping it with a spoon. You can help them, but encourage them to feed themselves. Eat together as much as possible.	A main course is based on a starchy food, with vegetables/salad and either protein and/or dairy food. Lunch and afternoon meal can include a main course, followed by some fruit or unsweetened yogurt.	A snack is a vegetable or fruit or a starchy food with/without protein (eg vegetable or fruit sticks, toast, bread). Avoid commercial baby snacks as they are high in salt and sugar.
<b>Nights</b>	It's normal for babies to breastfeed or formula feed at night. The frequency of night feeding should gradually reduce as the year goes on.			



**Milk feeds:** Continuing breastfeeding when introducing solids will keep giving your baby nutrients, protection against illness and comfort, for as long as you carry on. It's good for you too. Breastfeeding babies naturally reduce their feeds as they take more solids. If using formula, continue to use first (Stage 1) formula up to one year (reducing to no more than 300–400ml a day by 12 months).

After 12 months replace formula with full fat cow's milk (no more than 400ml a day as a drink or in food eg in cereal, yogurt). Aim to stop bottles (and dummies) by one year and offer all drinks in a free-flowing cup.

**Healthy Start vitamin drops from birth:** to make sure your baby has enough vitamin D. These are available free in Islington for all children under four years.

**A baby's gag reflex** is nature's way of stopping babies from swallowing food that has not been chewed enough. It brings food back to the front of the mouth.

Your baby may turn red in the face and cough and splutter, but usually continues to eat and is less bothered by it than you are. Make sure that they are sitting upright so the food can fall forward out of their mouth. As they get older, they will gag less. Gagging is not the same as choking, when something blocks the airway. Choking is quiet so always stay with your baby when eating.

**Food allergies:** evidence suggests that the best way to avoid food allergy is to introduce the common allergenic foods (cow's milk, egg, fish, peanuts and other nuts, sesame, shellfish, soy, wheat) early on when starting solid foods.

If you have a strong family history of allergy, or your baby has an already diagnosed food allergy or eczema, speak to your health visitor first.

## Useful resources, websites and apps

- **Islington Milk & More recipe book** – [www.islington.gov.uk/starting-solids](http://www.islington.gov.uk/starting-solids)
- **First Steps Nutrition Trust** – Photos of all kinds of finger and mashed foods, recipes, guidance on finger and mashed foods, portion sizes and eating well from pregnancy to five years'. Including: 'Eating well: the first year' and 'Eating well recipe book' – [www.firststepsnutrition.org](http://www.firststepsnutrition.org)
- **Family Information Service, Islington** – For more information, including about starting on solids workshops and other services for families with babies and young children – [www.islington.gov.uk/starting-solids](http://www.islington.gov.uk/starting-solids)
- **Start4Life** – Department of Health website with information about weaning (starting on solids), as well as other topics – [www.nhs.uk/start4life](http://www.nhs.uk/start4life)
- **'Ready, steady...eat!'** – 'A parents' guide to starting babies on solid food' – video – from Cornwall Healthy Weight – <https://youtu.be/tuhNNAqS3IO>