

Milk & More

Starting your baby on solid food



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This leaflet sets out the latest guidance, based on research, for weaning babies. It gives information on when to change babies' diets from having only milk to also eating some solid food and how to do this. It also gives the reasons behind the recommendations, based on the child's development.

Starting babies on solid foods should begin:

- 🍌 **when their nutritional needs are no longer met completely in breast or formula milk** - they need other foods and fluids to provide extra nutrients to meet their body's needs, though milk continues to be a vital source of nutrients. The World Health Organisation encourages mothers to continue breastfeeding for 2 years or longer, along with other foods, as breastmilk continues to provide significant nutrients and protection against illness. The benefits of breastfeeding are greater the longer you breastfeed, for both babies and mothers
- 🍌 **when the development of their body and skills means that they can cope well** with such foods, and are eager to try them, without risking any harm



These two things usually happen around 6 months when the baby accepts new tastes and textures easily. Delaying much beyond this age can lead to future problems, such as fussy eating. Giving solids too early, though, can make children more likely to become overweight.



It is quite common for babies of this age to be waking during the night: giving solid food too early does not help this. All children are different and will progress at their own pace through the weaning period. The amount they eat will vary from child to child and from day to day. Don't worry if your child does not eat a lot one day - it is more important how it balances out over a week.

We hope you find these guidelines useful. If you have any questions, please talk to your health visitor, community nursery nurse or a member of staff at the local children's centre.



This document complements the Department of Health weaning leaflets. It was developed in Islington by representatives of the health visiting, dietetics and children's centre services in June 2008.

Principles of weaning

1. Start introducing new foods and fluids, as well as breastmilk or formula, **when your child is 6 months old**. There are many reasons to wait until this time:
 - a) Breastmilk is the best source of the nutrients a baby needs for good growth and development, especially brain development. Giving anything other than breastmilk, or formula if you are not breastfeeding, before 6 months means the baby may not take enough milk to meet his or her needs.
 - b) Babies' digestive systems and kidneys are not mature enough to cope with other foods until 6 months. Giving anything else may increase the risk of allergies and infections, like gastroenteritis.
 - c) Before 6 months, babies are still learning the skills they need to eat solid food. At 6 months, they are eager to try new foods and are able to reach out and pick up foods to feed themselves.
 - d) At 6 months, your baby's tongue will be able to move foods around the mouth. He or she is also less likely to gag or choke.
 - e) A baby who starts taking other foods and fluids at this age does not need food pureed and can manage family foods straightaway.
2. Start by offering one meal a day and build up, so that by 1 year your baby is having 3 meals and 2 healthy snacks. Babies have high nutrient needs but small stomachs, so need to eat frequently. Offer different tastes and textures.
3. Allow babies to take food in their hands and feed themselves. This can be messy but helps them to learn essential skills. You can also offer soft foods on a spoon. Food can be mashed or cut up at first, if you choose, but it is important to increase the lumpiness quickly, so that by 12 months your baby is taking normal family foods. Freshly prepared and home-cooked food is best for babies.
4. It is important for meals to contain all the nutrients a baby needs. No one type of food has all the nutrients. Meals need to be made up of a range of different foods including starchy foods, protein foods and fruit and vegetables (see the tables for more information). You can use herbs and spices, but make sure they are not too strong. Do not add salt or sugar when cooking or afterwards, or use salty or sugary foods or fluids, as these can cause problems. Check ingredients on food labels for

added sugar. Do not give low fat milk or foods - babies need all the nutrients in full-fat milk. Semi-skimmed milk should not be used as a drink until the child is 2 years, and skimmed milk not until 5 years.

5. Babies' stomachs are about the same size as their fists, which helps guide what size portions to give. Giving lots of bulky food (like very high fibre foods) can fill a baby's stomach but provides few nutrients.
6. The Department of Health recommends daily vitamin drops (Vitamins A, C & D) for babies between 6 and 12 months who are breastfed or take less than 500ml of formula a day, and for all children between 1 and 5 years. This is because of an increasing incidence of rickets and other vitamin deficiencies in the UK. Families eligible for Healthy Start can obtain these drops free.
7. For breastfed babies, as your baby takes more solids, continue to breastfeed on demand, as the baby will regulate their own intake. It is recommended for your baby to continue breastfeeding for 2 years or longer. Give any other fluids in a cup.
8. If you are formula feeding, as your baby takes more solids, gradually reduce the amount of formula milk you give them to about 500-600 ml a day, either as a drink or in food. Having more than this means they will eat less food and miss out on essential nutrients. Start giving milk and fluids in a cup, rather than a bottle, as it is difficult to wean them off the bottle later and can affect their speech and dental health.
9. Babies often react to new things by screwing up their face, or spitting new food out. Do not worry about this - just try again later. You may need to offer a new food 10-20 times before it is accepted.
10. Healthy growth results from enough of the right kind of food; babies know when they have had enough. They show this by turning their head away, closing their mouth or pushing food away. Let them set the pace. Do not force or trick a baby to eat. If they do not want to eat, wait until the next mealtime. Do not give sweet or salty snacks in between to make up for what they did not have.
11. Avoid distractions like TV and toys during mealtimes. Praise children when they eat well. They will often eat more when they eat at the same time as other family members.

From Birth

Baby's development	What food/fluids	When and how to feed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sucking• Rooting• Crying <p>Digestive system & kidneys are immature but able to process breast milk</p>	<p>Milk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breastmilk, on demand <p>or, if not breastfeeding,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formula - 2¹/₂ fluid ounces per lb body weight in 24 hrs (150ml/kg) <p>Formula-fed babies may need extra water in hot weather</p>	<p>When hungry</p> <p>Hold the baby close to you and feed them using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breast• Bottle• Cup

Avoid

- All solid foods, as breastmilk, or formula milk if not breastfeeding, provides all a baby needs
- All other fluids, if breastfed
- Giving anything other than milk in a bottle
- Adding food to milk



Around 4-5 months

Baby's development	What food/fluids	When and how to feed
<p>During this time babies are learning skills that will enable them to start taking solids at 6 months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sociable - aware of what others are doing• Starts to reach out for objects, including food• Watches others eat• Can hold head up• Munching movements• May have growth spurts when they seem hungrier and will feed more often for a few days to boost milk supply (or need some extra feeds if formula fed)	<p>Milk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breastmilk, on demand <p>or, if not breastfeeding,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formula - 2½ fluid ounces per lb body weight in 24 hrs (150ml/kg) <p>Milk is still the best source of all your baby needs for good growth and development, such as brain development. Giving anything else may mean your baby will not take enough milk. It may also harm your baby, as their body systems are not mature enough to cope with it.</p> <p>Waiting till 6 months also means your baby can move on quickly to family foods.</p> <p>There are also many foods you would have to avoid if you were to give anything at this age (such as fish, eggs, dairy products, wheat, liver, nuts and sesame).</p>	<p>When hungry</p> <p>Hold the baby close to you and feed them using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breast• Bottle• Cup

Avoid

- All solid foods as breastmilk, or formula milk if you are not breastfeeding, provides all a baby needs
- All other fluids, if breastfed
- Giving anything other than milk in a bottle
- Adding food to milk

6 -12 months – ready for solid foods

Baby's development	What food/fluids
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wants to do what others are doing• Can sit up with support• Able to reach out and hold small objects• Takes objects to mouth and chews on them• Tongue can move food around mouth• Reflex causing the baby to gag moves further back in mouth• Able to eat food off a spoon and start to drink from a cup• Able to cope with lumpier foods• Needs extra nutrients, like iron, from solid foods as well as milk• Has a small stomach so needs to eat frequently• Can react to new foods by screwing up face and spitting out• Indicates “No” or “Enough” – may close mouth, push food away or turn face away• Body systems mature enough to take solid food	<p>Milk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breastfeed on demand – babies will regulate their own intake• or, if not breastfeeding, gradually reduce formula milk intake as solids are introduced, to 500 –600ml per day – as drink or in food <p>Offer meals & snacks containing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• raw or softly cooked fruit (e.g. pear) or vegetables – starting once a day and increasing gradually to 4 times a day by 1 year• starchy foods (e.g. bread, chapati, pasta, rice cereal, potatoes) – starting once a day and gradually increasing to 4 times a day by 1 year• meat, chicken, fish, eggs, beans & pulses like lentils (dhal) and peas, dairy products like cheese, yoghurt, fromage frais, custard – give at least once per day if animal protein, twice a day if non-animal protein <p>Vitamin drops, if breastfed or taking less than 500ml formula. (See principles for more details.)</p> <p>Tap water – use an open cup, or a free-flow cup without a valve, preferably with 2 handles. This helps the baby learn to sip and is better for your baby's teeth.</p>

When and how to feed

- Start with one meal a day and build up gradually. By 1 year offer 3 meals and 2 healthy snacks. Examples of healthy snacks include: fresh fruit; raw vegetables; cheese cubes; plain yoghurt with added fruit; bread, chapati or rice cake with paste, banana, mashed sardines or hummus; breakfast cereal with milk
- Offer softly cooked and /or mashed foods on a spoon. Work towards increasingly lumpy foods. By 12 months babies should take normal family foods.
- Give finger foods to pick up in hands to eat - be prepared for messy eating while they learn these skills. These could include soft fruit, raw or softly cooked vegetables, rice cakes, bread.
- Portions should be about the same size as the baby's fist
- Sit babies up to eat so they can reach out for foods better & are less likely to choke
- Stay with them as they eat to encourage them and make sure they do not choke
- Offer solid food after a milk feed, or in the middle of one, if that works better
- Use a cup to give milk or fluids.

Avoid

- Salt
- Sugar
- Whole nuts
- Honey
- Soft cooked egg
- Juices, squash
- Rice or soya "milks" & goats milk
- Cow's milk as drink
- Skimmed or semi-skimmed milk
- Reduced calorie or low fat food
- Salty or sugary foods like crisps, sweets, biscuits.
- Excessive high fibre foods, which fill up babies' stomachs too quickly
- Tea or coffee - these reduce iron absorption
- Excessively spicy foods



1 year and onwards - taking family foods

Baby's development	What food/fluids	When and how to feed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Able to feed themselves by hand and with a spoon• Can drink from a cup without spout• Able to sit and enjoy mealtimes with family members or carer	<p>Family foods of normal adult texture, in three meals and two snacks a day. Food may be cut up, if necessary - there is no need to puree or mash.</p> <p>Milk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• breastmilk, on demand• or if not breastfeeding, full-fat cow's milk - no more than 500-600ml/day (as drink or in food). <p>Vitamin drops for all children 1-5 years</p> <p>Tap water</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Always use a cup for drinks, not a bottle. Going to bed with a bottle will cause tooth decay• Water & milk are the best drinks, but if using fruit juice, dilute 1 part juice to 10 parts water to prevent tooth decay• Give drinks during or after meals so your baby's stomach is not full up with fluid before eating• If your baby is not breastfeeding and does not like drinking milk, give full-fat dairy products like yogurt, cheese or cheese sauce or milk puddings daily to ensure enough calcium

Avoid

- Semi-skimmed milk before 2 years of age
- Skimmed milk before 5 years
- Tea and coffee
- Fizzy drinks, squash, Ribena, carton drinks
- High salt or sugar foods like crisps, biscuits, sweets
- Whole nuts
- Excessively high fibre foods, e.g. bran



You will want to make sure that your child's diet contains enough iron, folate, and other vitamins and minerals. Here are some ideas about foods that contain these nutrients.

Foods containing **IRON & FOLATE** needed for good body system function and carrying of oxygen in the blood. Choose a variety of these foods and eat them with Vitamin C rich foods to help iron absorption

- 🍌 Breastmilk
- 🍌 Fortified breakfast cereals
- 🍌 Kidney and liver
- 🍌 Meat, especially beef, lamb/mutton, goat. Also chicken and turkey
- 🍌 Wholemeal bread/flour
- 🍌 Sardines, pilchards & other oily fish
- 🍌 Pulses e.g. lentils, chick peas, soya, beans
- 🍌 Spinach, broccoli, spring greens, kale
- 🍌 Dried apricots, raisins
- 🍌 Parsnip, potatoes

Foods containing other **VITAMINS & MINERALS** needed for good immunity and healthy skin, eyes, bones, teeth, muscles and nervous system

Vitamin A: liver; orange-fleshed fruits/vegetables and dark green leafy vegetables e.g. carrots, squash, sweet potatoes, red peppers, spinach, mango, papaya, apricots, breastmilk

Vitamin C: citrus fruits (orange, satsuma), blackcurrants, tinned guava, spring greens, spinach, brussel sprouts, green and red peppers, strawberries, mango, kiwi fruit

Vitamin D: fortified breakfast cereals, oily fish, egg, liver. Spend time outside, as sunshine is necessary for providing Vitamin D.

Zinc: liver, kidney, lean meat, corned beef, bacon & ham, oily fish, whole grain breakfast cereals, beans, lentils, ground peanuts (peanut butter) or sesame seeds (tahini), wholemeal bread, eggs, milk

Calcium: green leafy vegetables, sardines & pilchards, cheese, tofu, breastmilk, milk, yogurt, sesame seed, ground almonds, figs, beans, lentils, dried fruit

Photographs in this leaflet were taken at Rosedale Early Years Centre by Tessa Hallman and at Kate Greenaway Nursery School and Children's Centre by Lottie Davies.

If you would like more copies of this leaflet, or copies in another language or large font please contact:

Children's Information Service
Telephone: 020 7527 5959
Email: cis@islington.gov.uk

For further information please contact your local children's centre or health visitor

This leaflet is also available in Turkish, Somali, Bengali, Arabic, Spanish, French and Albanian.