

Baby Nosh

A short guide to introducing baby's first foods

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Baby steps

introducing first foods



The Department of Health recommends introducing complementary feeding at around six months.

Complementary feeding, or weaning, is the gradual introduction of solid foods to a baby's diet. For the first 6 months, breastmilk or infant formula provide all the nutrients a baby needs except vitamin D, but as they get older, they need more nutrients and energy from food to help them grow and develop well.

During this time, babies experience new tastes and textures to help them develop new feeding skills. This booklet will help to guide you as you introduce your baby to their first foods and beyond.

When is it best to start?

Let your baby guide you. Start at around 6 months, when your baby is showing these 3 signs that they are ready:

- They can sit with support and hold their head steady
- They like to watch others eating
- They put toys and other objects in their mouth

Introduce these foods around 6 months and one by one:

- milk and dairy foods
- eggs
- foods containing wheat or gluten
- smooth peanut butter and other nut butters
- well cooked fish and shellfish

If your child tolerates these foods and shows no signs of allergy, keep offering them as part of your baby's regular diet to minimise the risk of developing a food allergy.

Pre-term babies

If your baby was born prematurely, ask their medical team for guidance. The appropriate age for introducing first foods will depend on how prematurely your baby was born. See www.bliss.org.uk for further information on weaning premature babies.

Where to begin?

Some babies will be ready to move on to **mashed and finger foods immediately**, whereas others may prefer smoother foods from a spoon. Offer both so that your baby learns both types of feeding skills.

Start slowly – try a few baby feeding spoons and soft finger foods of:



baby cereal mixed with breastmilk or infant formula (e.g. porridge)



puréed or mashed soft ripe or cooked fruit or cooked vegetables or family meals without salt (e.g. potato, yam, parsnip, apple or pear – cool before eating)



soft ripe or cooked fruit as finger food (e.g. banana, mango, melon or avocado)



soft, cooked vegetables as finger food (e.g. carrot, broccoli florets, sweet potato)

What next?

Go for textures

Gradually introduce foods with soft lumps so your baby learns to manage foods with different textures.

Finger foods

Cut up foods into pieces big enough for your baby to hold in their fist, with a bit sticking out at the top. Pieces about the size of your own finger work well.

New foods

Gradually introduce more new foods! Try soft cooked meat, lentils, and hard boiled eggs as your baby needs the iron in these foods. Combine them with vegetables and pasta or rice.

Go for variety

Offer different foods on different days. Babies take time to learn to like new foods - this is completely normal - so keep offering foods they might not seem to like at first!

Now is the time

Introduce whole milk yogurt, fromage frais and custard.

Cups

Introduce an open cup or free flow cup (with no valve), and offer sips of water with meals. This will help your baby learn to sip and is better for their teeth. Aim to discontinue bottles around their first birthday.

Vitamins



The Department of Health recommends that babies begin a vitamin D supplement from birth. Infant formula is fortified with vitamin D so healthy babies having 500ml or more a day don't need this supplement. Vitamins A & C are recommended from age 6 months onwards.

Do it in steps

Gradually increase the amount and variety of foods your baby eats until they can eat 3 small family meals a day, with no added salt or sugar.

Foods to take care with

Foods that can cause allergies (e.g. milk, eggs, nuts, wheat, soya, fish, sesame), and foods containing these ingredients, should be introduced one at a time giving the food each day for 3 days so you can spot a reaction. If your baby has moderate to severe eczema, speak to your healthcare professional before introducing foods from the list above.

Soya-based infant formula and soya products should only be used if advised by your healthcare professional, as babies who are allergic to cow's milk may also have other allergies.

Choking is rare in young babies

But take care before giving foods to your baby:

- Cut small round foods in half e.g. grapes or cherry tomatoes
- Peel and lightly cook hard fruits and vegetables e.g. apples and carrots
- Cut cheese into sticks rather than cubes
- Remove any stones or pips
- Remove skin and bones from fish, meat and meat products e.g. chicken

Always stay with your baby when they are eating in case they start to choke.

Consult your health visitor if you have concerns about allergy.

Not for little tumms

Sugar Your baby does not need added sugar. Avoiding sugary foods and drinks will help prevent tooth decay.

Honey Do not introduce before the age of one as it sometimes contains a bacteria that can produce toxins, and may lead to infant botulism.

Salt Do not add salt to your baby's food. Use herbs and spices rather than salt to flavour food.

Whole Nuts As they may cause choking. You can use nut butters and finely ground nuts in food.

Foods intended for adults e.g. low-fat, low-sugar, artificially sweetened foods. Raw or undercooked fish or meat.

Swordfish, marlin and shark
The amount of mercury in these fish can affect a baby's growing nervous system.



Top tips

First foods

Handy hints

- Make batches of mashed or puréed food and freeze in ice-cube trays or containers
- Defrost cubes as required in the fridge overnight or defrost in the microwave
- Reheat food thoroughly until hot all the way through
- Remember to let food cool down before offering it to your baby.



Allow your baby to feed themselves using their fingers, as soon as they show an interest.

It can get messy but this is an important part of your baby's development.


Continue to offer breastmilk or formula milk feeds but allow...

...your baby to gradually reduce the amount of milk drunk as he or she starts eating more food.

Offer water in a lidded cup without a valve with all meals.

Never leave your baby alone with a bottle, or give one to help with sleep, as it could cause choking.

Milky matters



Only breastmilk or infant formula should be given as a main drink for under-ones. As babies start to eat more solid food, they will want fewer milk feeds so you can drop them gradually.

'Follow-on' formula can be introduced only after 6 months **but it is not necessary to move your baby on to these milks.**

Whole cow's milk can be given as a drink once your child is 1 year old.

Milk-based puddings like yogurt or rice pudding are good milky options.

You may choose to continue giving your baby breastmilk alongside family foods for as long as it suits you and baby.

Milk-like drinks are not nutritionally similar to cow's milk, and may be low in protein and other important nutrients. If your little one has a cow's milk allergy, speak to a Registered Dietitian for advice.

Rice drinks aren't suitable for children under 5 because of the levels of arsenic they may contain. Other alternatives to cow's milk may be served after your child is 1 year old.

From 7-9 months on...

Offer your baby 3 meals a day, in addition to breastmilk or formula.

Infants of this age should still be given milk feeds responsively, but may want about four feeds a day.

They will be having a mixture of soft finger foods, mashed and chopped foods.

Each day try to give your baby a variety of foods including:

- **Fruit and vegetables**
- **Starchy foods** (e.g. potatoes, rice, pasta, couscous, quinoa and bread)
- **Meat, fish** (well-cooked, no bones), well-cooked eggs, pulses (peas, beans or lentils) and nut butters
- **Whole milk and dairy products** Foods made from whole milk, such as unsweetened yogurt, fromage frais and custard. Whole milk can be used in cooking or added to other foods such as cereal.

Feeding a one-year-old

Your baby can join in with the family by eating 3 meals a day by their first birthday.

Try and make their diet as varied as possible.

Whole milk can now be introduced as a main drink. Milk should be given in a cup.

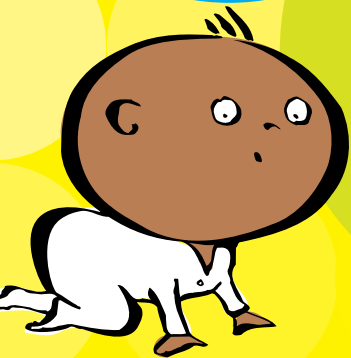
Each day try to give your child:

- **Starchy foods at each meal** (e.g. potatoes, pasta, rice, couscous, quinoa, bread)
- **A variety of protein** 2 servings of meat, fish eggs, beans and lentils or nut butters
- **Fruit and vegetables** Encourage your child to try lots of different fruit and veg. Include them in all meals. Try adding banana or grated apple to breakfast cereal or carrots or red pepper to pasta sauces to boost servings
- **Whole milk and dairy** 3 servings a day as a drink, in milk-based dishes, or as cheese, yogurt or fromage frais

Safe food

Top tips for keeping baby food safe

- Keep all utensils and surfaces clean.
- Wash your hands and your baby's hands before meals.
- Thoroughly wash all bowls and spoons for feeding.
- Peel or wash fruit and veg.
- Throw away half-eaten food.
- When heating up food, always stir it well and make sure it's steaming all the way through.
- Cooked food can be stored in the fridge for up to 24 hours but do not reheat it more than once.
- Cook all food thoroughly and check the temperature before offering food to your baby.



Snack attack

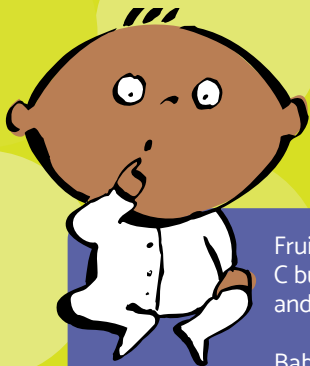
Little ones have small tummies and so smaller, more frequent meals and healthy snacks will suit them better.



Some snack ideas to try:

- Canned fruit in fruit juice
- Soft, peeled fresh fruit
- Plain yogurt with sliced grapes
- Hard cheese (sliced or cut into sticks) and sliced tomatoes
- Pitta or chapatti fingers
- Unsalted and unsweetened rice cakes
- Pepper sticks





Your questions answered

Should I give my baby fruit drinks, squash or fruit juice?

Fruit juices are a good source of vitamin C but they also contain natural sugars and acids which can cause tooth decay.

Babies under 12 months don't need fruit juice or smoothies. If you choose to give these to your baby, restrict them to mealtimes and dilute one part juice to 10 parts water to minimise risk of tooth decay.

The best drinks to give between meals are breastmilk, infant formula, or water. All water should be boiled and then cooled for babies under six months. Bottled water is not sterile and may contain too much sodium (salt).

When should I switch my baby from a bottle to a cup?

Introduce an open cup or a free-flow cup (with no valve) when your baby is six months old. Try and finish with the bottle by his or her first birthday. Prolonged bottle feeding may damage teeth.

Should I give my baby ready-made baby food?

Jars of ready-made baby food are convenient, but portion sizes are often too big and much of it has the same texture. Homemade baby food is usually cheaper and made from simple ingredients. If you do buy ready-made food, look at the ingredients label to check that it does not contain added sugar or salt. Don't reuse food that your child has half-eaten.

Can I give my baby low-fat foods?

No, save low-fat foods for later in life. Babies need fat- and fat-soluble vitamins, like vitamin A, to help them grow and develop. For example, choose yogurts made from whole milk.

How can I make sure my baby gets enough iron?

Babies are born with a store of iron that will last about six months. After that they need to get iron from their food. Red meat is the best source of iron e.g. beef, and dark poultry meat such as thigh or leg meat. Other foods such as eggs, lentils and beans work best when given alongside vitamin C rich foods such as tomatoes, broccoli and fruit.

Is it OK to give my baby goat's or sheep's milk?

These can be used in cooking after 6 months but not as a drink until age 1 year as they don't contain all the nutrients that babies need.

Information sources (accessed 08/2022)

NHS Choices. Drinks and cups for babies and young children
www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/weaning-and-feeding/drinks-and-cups-for-babies-and-young-children/

NHS Choices. Food allergies in babies and young children
www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/food-allergies-in-children.aspx

NHS Choices. Foods to avoid giving babies and young children
www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/foods-to-avoid-baby.aspx

NHS Choices. Your baby's first solid foods
www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/Pages/solid-foods-weaning.aspx

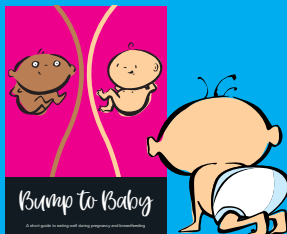
NHS Start 4 Life, What is weaning?
www.nhs.uk/start4life/first-foods

NHS Get help to buy food and milk (Healthy Start) Getting vitamins
www.healthystart.nhs.uk/getting-vitamins/

BDA Complementary feeding (weaning): Food Fact Sheet
www.bda.uk.com/resource/complementary-feeding-weaning.html

Bliss. Weaning your premature baby
www.bliss.org.uk/parents/about-your-baby/feeding/weaning-your-premature-baby

First Steps Nutrition Trust (2020) Eating well for new mums: Including information for breastfeeding mothers
www.firststepsnutrition.org/eating-well-infants-new-mums



For details on additional information sources please contact Dairy UK

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