



WEANING YOUR BABY

Weaning is simply the introduction of solid food into your baby's diet. Before four months of age, babies are unable to properly digest any foods other than breast or formula milk.

However between the ages of four and six months, most babies are ready to start on some solids.

At this point they require more iron and nutrients than milk can provide alone. It does not mean that they no longer need breast or formula milk, although they will begin to reduce the amount they need as they replace a larger proportion of their nutrients with solid food.

Weaning can be a great cause for concern for parents, particularly parents who are weaning their first child. There is conflicting advice as to when you should wean and in addition to this there are varied views from parents as to what and how to approach the task.

It should, however, not be looked upon as a stressful task, but a fun developmental stage with your child; one with plenty of mess and an often amusing, shared experience!

When to start?

The UK policy is to introduce complementary foods at around 6 months and progress responsively, in line with individual babies' progress and acceptance. Not all babies need solids at the same time; in every aspect of infant development there is a wide range of normal.

Babies tend to give clues about when they are ready to try solids – they show an interest in people eating, they can sit up and reach and chew on anything they can grab!

They may also want to feed more and may wake more in the night to feed. Certainly resist weaning before 4 months and then follow your baby's cues and the advice of your health visitor.

What Should You Start With?

A few spoonfuls of mashed or pureed fruit (pear/cooked apple/banana), baby rice or pureed vegetables (carrot/parsnip/potato) are the perfect first foods for babies.

All of these can be mixed with breast or formula milk to make it runny. Give this to your baby with a soft baby spoon, once a day, before moving onto two or three times a day within a few weeks.



How Do You Start?

Go at your baby's pace and be relaxed.

Allow plenty of time for feeding, especially at first and be prepared for mess – your baby needs to learn to move solid food from the front of the tongue to the back in order to swallow it, as well as accept new flavours.

A few guidelines:

- Always stay nearby when your baby is eating to ensure that he/she doesn't choke
- Don't take your baby's rejection of your food personally, or worry that he/she will starve
- If your baby is not interested in solids, do not persist – try again another day.

It is good for your baby to learn about the texture and feels of foods – this is all part of their development. Therefore, try to be relaxed and allow them to put their fingers in their food and smear it over their faces. It is also good to try to include your baby in family meals and allow them to feed themselves.

Baby-Led Weaning

The practice of 'baby-led weaning' is becoming more widespread, where babies are allowed to play with appropriately prepared solid foods and decide for themselves when to eat. Experience in this area suggests that babies naturally start to ingest complementary foods at around 6 months of age, when various developmental factors (hand-eye coordination, mastication ability, etc.) come together.

Many parents find themselves following baby-led weaning without even thinking about it.

This is particularly the case with second and later children who love to copy their older siblings and try to grab food from their plates, happy to feed themselves just as their brother or sister does.

Dieticians tend to think that it's important to give your baby a variety of textures, so sloppy foods on a spoon as well as finger foods are a good idea.

Foods To Avoid Giving Your Baby

- Do not give your baby any salt – therefore remember not to add it during cooking. Their kidneys cannot cope with it
- Avoid sugar – it can encourage a sweet tooth from an early age
- Also avoid honey until your child is one – not only will it encourage a sweet tooth, but occasionally it can contain a bacteria which can produce toxins in a baby's intestines and cause serious illness (infant botulism)
- Avoid nuts until your child is five in case of choking and allergy.



You should also avoid the following foods until your child is at least six months old:

- Wheat based foods that contain gluten, nuts and seeds
- eggs, fish and shellfish
- citrus fruits
- soft and unpasteurised cheeses.

Older Babies

Once your baby has been weaned onto solid foods, make sure they are trying a large variety of foods, including cereals, bread and pasta and at least a dozen different fruits and vegetables, eventually adding more protein, cooked tofu, meats etc.

Once your child is happy with a variety of meat products, try adding some fish to their diet. You can buy jars of pureed meat, stews, or casseroles or you make your own almost as easily. Just add a little water before you puree the meat and you should get the right consistency.

If you want your baby to be a vegetarian, they can get the protein and calcium they need from formula, as well as a variety of beans, peas and green leafy vegetables.

If, however, you are raising your baby as a vegan, you will need to take extra care to ensure your child's normal growth and development. To provide nutritional balance, continue to breast-feed your baby throughout the first year if possible.

When introducing solid foods, serve whole-grain cereals, breads and pasta. Make sure your child also eats plenty of high protein foods (tofu, brown rice, beans and peas) and calcium rich foods.

Whether feeding vegans, vegetarians or meat-eaters, try to provide nutritional balance as your child eats more and more solids and less breast milk.

You can't go wrong if you offer your baby essentially the same balanced meals that the rest of the family eats, just pureed or mashed in smaller quantities.