

Introducing Solid Foods



Signs of readiness for solid food;

Baby can stay sitting and hold their head steady.

Baby can see food, reach for it, pick it up and put it in their mouth by themselves.

Baby can swallow food.

A baby will push food back out of their mouth if they are not ready for solids.

Signs of readiness occur at about 6 months.

Latest research from the World Health Organisation shows babies need nothing other than breast milk or first formula for the first 6 months of life.

The benefits of waiting to around 6 months:

It gives babies digestive system time to develop so it can fully cope with solid foods

Less risk of allergies / upset tummy / diarrhoea

No need to puree can just mash / chop foods

Baby can begin to feed themselves and will enjoy finger foods

Can have cow's milk in foods, use full fat milk

Can eat most foods (No added salt, no honey or whole nuts and avoid sugar)

Pre-term babies.

Solids can be introduced between about 5 and 8 months **from birth** for many babies born pre-term. Some pre-term babies will be under the care of a paediatrician and the paediatrician/HV may be supporting parents about decisions on when to introduce solids for certain babies.

The Bliss website has more information.

Homemade or jars / packets of baby food.

It is best to use home prepared foods whenever possible, commercially produced foods can be handy for occasional use. Home cooked food is easy as baby can join in family meals, get used to home cooked flavours, and it is considerably less expensive. Labels on baby foods may say they are suitable from 4 months, but 6 months is recommended.

Reading the contents labels on manufactured foods helps identify what has been added to the the food. Anything ending in 'ose' is a sort of sugar e.g. Glucose, fructose.

Equipment and safety:

Any equipment used to feed your baby needs to be cleaned. If using a spoon baby may also like one to hold / play with one. **Feeding bottles for milk should always be sterilised because they can harbour Bacteria.** **If using a High Chair Always strap ensure baby is strapped in it. Always stay with a baby when they are eating.**

Protection for floor is a good idea as feeding can be messy, a plastic tablecloth or newspaper under the highchair is ideal.

Choking hazards:

Hard foods, bones and small round foods like grapes and cherry tomatoes and foods with skins like sausages can be a choking hazard.

To minimise the risk never leave baby alone, peel skin off fruit, vegetables and sausages and remove all bones from meat and fish. Cut small round foods such as grapes into half lengthways or quarters. Most foods can be cut into a wedge shape that is easy to hold and chew. Circular shapes are a choking hazard.

Whole nuts should not be given to a child under 5 years old.

Baby may cough, gag or heave a bit when learning to take lumpy foods. This can happen when they try to swallow a lump whole. It is their way of bringing the lump back into their mouth to spit it out or to chew it up properly. This is normal for many babies when starting lumps. Calmly encourage baby and assure them that all is well.

Getting started:

Choose a calm time of the day to begin to offer solids

Offer a few teaspoons or pieces of food once a day to start with, when baby is not too hungry, perhaps an hour or so after a milk feed

Pieces of food can be put directly onto the clean tray of the highchair

Let baby touch, feel and play with the food from the start

If using a spoon, offer the food to baby, you can touch the baby's lips with the spoon but always wait until baby opens their mouth before you give it.

Do not force baby to take food, if they are not interested then try again later

Your baby can begin to feed themselves as soon as they show an interest. You can encourage this by offering suitable finger foods for them to try. A baby can also finger feed themselves porridge and other foods but it is messier.



Always re-heat foods thoroughly and stir to remove any hotspots and allow them to cool before offering to baby. Re-heat only once.

Do not add salt, honey or stock cubes to baby's food or to the cooking water.

Babies like to choose for themselves what they eat. It sometimes takes time for them to get used to different foods. If they seem not to like a food the first time they try it, offer it again in a few days time. Baby may need to try some foods lots of times to get used to them. In the beginning it is not important for baby to eat the food. It is more about baby learning about tastes and textures. It is a gradual process. Do not be concerned about the amount baby eats and always stop feeding when baby shows signs of having had enough. Signs may include turning their head away, clamping their mouth shut or pushing the spoon away.

First foods: Examples: mashed or soft cooked sticks of fruit and vegetables like sweet potato, parsnips, carrot, yam, apple and pear. Pieces of soft peach, melon, banana or soft avocado, large enough for baby to grab. Rice cake or baby rice mixed with breast or formula milk.

Next foods: Examples: soft cooked meat like chicken, pasta, noodles, toast, lentils, mashed hard-boiled egg. Dairy products, these should be full fat, like plain yoghurt, natural fromage frais, grated cheese or custard. Fruit can be added to yoghurt or custard. Choose products with no added sugar when possible as these are better for baby.



Moving on:

Once baby can manage mashed and soft foods it is good to move onto chopped up foods and more finger foods. These need to be offered by around 7-8 months.

If spoon feeding direct food to the side of baby's mouth to help encourage chewing. Gradually baby will move towards eating more like the rest of the family with 3 small meals and healthy snacks in between with a small drink of milk before bed. Breast or formula feeds will gradually reduce as baby begins to eat more foods. Use 1st stage formula until 1 year or continue breastfeeding for as long as desired. From 1 year baby can be given full fat cow's milk as a drink.

From 8-9 months baby's diet should include a variety of the following foods: Fruit and vegetables, bread, rice, pasta, potatoes and other starchy foods, meat, fish, well cooked eggs, beans, pulses and other non-dairy proteins, formula or breast milk and dairy products. Some cultures tend to rely heavily on dairy products; however these do not contain iron. It is important to give foods which contain iron to prevent anaemia. Good sources of iron include red meat, chicken, eggs, pulses, green leafy vegetables (especially spinach), and apricots. Absorption of iron from pulses, fruits and vegetables is assisted by vitamin C, so it is best to offer tomato, green and red peppers, kiwi fruit, strawberries, citrus fruits or melon at the same meal.

What to avoid:

Sweet drinks like squash, milkshakes and fruit juices that contain a lot of hidden sugar. Drinks that are marketed as ‘for babies’ can contain a lot of sugar. This sugar may be called by different names i.e. fructose or glucose. Avoid tea, coffee, energy, diet and low calorie drinks and flavoured water drinks as they are too high in sugar.

Offer baby small amounts of plain tap water in a free flowing beaker with meals instead.

Sweet foods: Chocolate, sweets, rusks, biscuits and cakes contain lots of added sugar and fats not needed by babies. Do not encourage a ‘sweet tooth’ as these preferences can be difficult to change.

Salt and salty foods: Bacon, sausages, crisps and convenience foods contain high salt levels and are bad for baby; they can put a strain on baby’s kidneys.

Honey: Can contain a germ that can be very dangerous to young babies and make them very ill. It should not be given to babies under a year old.

Cow’s milk should not replace breast or formula feeds until 1 year. *However it can be used in foods from 6 months*

Allergies:

Variety in your baby's diet is important; however there is a small chance that any baby may have an allergy to certain foods.

It is important therefore to introduce cow's milk, eggs, wheat, gluten, nuts, peanuts, peanut products, seeds, fish and shellfish into baby's diet **one at a time** and not before six months of age. Peanuts, like all nuts should be crushed or ground.

If your baby already has a known allergy, such as a diagnosed food allergy or eczema, or you have a family history of food allergies, eczema, asthma or hay-fever, you may need to be particularly careful when introducing peanuts and peanut products. It is best to talk to your doctor before giving them to baby.

Vitamins:

In the UK all children between birth and 5 years old are at risk of vitamin D deficiency. All babies and children (unless taking a pint of infant formula/24 hours) between these ages are therefore recommended a daily multivitamin supplement containing vitamin D to keep bones and teeth healthy.

It is difficult to get sufficient vitamin D from foods alone, and although vitamin D can be made by exposure of the skin to sunshine it is limited by the need to use sunscreen to avoid burning.

Suitable drops and liquid supplements are available from pharmacies and many supermarkets or via the Healthy Start scheme.

Foods containing Vitamin D include oily fish like mackerel, sardines and salmon, eggs, fortified cereals and fats.

Further information please visit the following:

<https://www.glos-care.nhs.uk/>

www.bliss.org.uk

<https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/first-foods>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Change4Life/Pages/food-labels.aspx>

<https://www.nhs.uk/change4life-beta/be-food-smart>

<https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/first-foods>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Change4Life/Pages/meal-planner-recipe-finder.aspx>

<http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/First-aid/Mobile-app>

<http://www.nhs.uk/choking-baby>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/Pages/baby-safety-tips.aspx#choking>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Vegetarianhealth/Pages/Vegetarianhealthhome.aspx>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/Pages/vegetarian-vegan-children.aspx>

<http://lifib.org.uk/>