

Baby care - weaning

Breast milk or infant formula should be your baby's main source of nutrition for around the first year of life. It is recommended to introduce solids from six months of age, depending on your baby's developmental readiness and preference. The idea is to expose your baby to new tastes and textures, encourage the development of their jaws and teeth, and pave the way for enjoying food and eating in the future. Be guided by your baby and let them set the pace.

Your baby may not be ready for solids

If a young baby is offered solids, they will poke out their tongue and push the food out of their mouth. This instinct or reflex prevents choking and indicates your baby is not ready for solids.

Signs your baby may be ready for solids

Signs that your baby may be ready for solids include:

- They no longer display the tongue-poke reflex.
- They are able to hold their head unsupported.
- They watch you eat with interest.
- They indicate, through gestures and sounds, their interest in sampling whatever it is you're eating.
- They hold their mouth open and imitate eating behaviour.

Getting started

Suggestions for getting your baby started on solids include:

- Offer solids between milk feeds, when your baby is neither too hungry nor too full.
- Use a high chair with a suitable harness, or sit your baby upright on your lap facing you.
- Expect a mess and plan for it.
- The spoon should be small, shallow and soft.
- The food should be smooth and runny.
- Avoid adding salt or sugar.
- To check for adverse reactions, introduce one food at a time. Keep offering that same food for two or three days before introducing another.
- Start with approximately half a teaspoon.
- Gradually increase the amount over days or weeks, allowing your baby to set the pace.
- Never force your baby to eat.

Foods to choose

Suggestions for foods to start your baby on include:

- **Six months of age** - the food needs to be smooth in texture. Appropriate solids include iron-fortified baby rice cereal, mixed with breast milk or formula, and finely mashed fruits and vegetables such as banana, pear, apple, pumpkin, potato, avocado and carrot. Begin with half a teaspoon and gradually increase to two to three tablespoons, using a soft teaspoon for feeding.

- **Seven to nine months** - at this age, the food can be lumpier (perhaps mashed or minced). Babies chew food with their gums, so don't feel you must wait until a certain number of teeth appear before introducing foods with a firmer texture. Start widening the variety of their meals by including such foods as well-cooked meat, chicken, fish, rice, pasta and cheese.
- **Ten to 12 months** - food should be becoming more important at this age. Offer your baby solid food before his or her breast or formula feed. Allow your child to feed themselves. Foods which encourage biting and chewing include finger sandwiches, steamed vegetable sticks and strips of well-cooked meat.
- **After weaning** it is recommended that your child continue to have three or four milk drinks per day or a dairy equivalent.

Weaning your baby from the breast

Some women gradually, partially or abruptly wean when their baby starts on solids, while others continue to breastfeed throughout the first few years of their child's life. It is up to you and your baby to decide on the best time to wean. Don't be pressured to wean by relatives or experts.

After making the decision to wean, it helps to remember that breasts make milk on demand. The more your baby suckles, the more milk is produced. Conversely the less milk taken, the less your breasts make for the next feed. Keep this simple supply-and-demand concept in mind, and wean your child slowly over time. Stopping too suddenly can lead to painful engorgement of the breasts and an increased susceptibility to infection (mastitis).

Suggestions for weaning

The pace at which you choose to wean is your personal choice. This is influenced by the physical comfort of your breasts, your emotional readiness and your baby's adaptability to the change.

Start by replacing one breastfeed each week. For babies under one year of age, use a suitable infant formula. Children over one year of age can drink full cream cow's milk, using either a bottle or a cup. Continue to replace feeds until your baby is drinking formula or cow's milk exclusively. This can take anywhere from a few weeks to a few months, depending on your milk supply. You may have to wear nursing pads for a while, as breasts tend to leak during the weaning process.

Engorged breasts

Your breasts may become engorged during the weaning process. It may help if you:

- Express a little milk from each breast, either by hand or with a breast pump.
- Make sure your bra is supportive, well-fitting and comfortable.
- Apply cold packs or a frozen face washer to each breast.
- Check your breasts regularly for red and tender areas or lumps, as this can indicate inflammation or infection (mastitis).

If these measures fail or if you feel very unwell, visit your doctor or Maternal Child Health Nurse.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Maternal and child health nurse
- Lactation consultant
- Maternal and Child Health Telephone Service Tel. 132 229
- Australian Breastfeeding Association Helpline Tel. (03) 9885 0653
- Tweddle Child and Family Services Tel. (03) 9689 1577

Things to remember

- It is recommended to introduce solid foods from six months of age.
- Offer one food at a time, to help your baby experience a variety of new tastes and textures and to check for adverse reactions to a particular type of food.
- If you are breastfeeding and decide to wean, it is best to do this gradually. Wean your baby from the breast over weeks or months to reduce the risk of uncomfortable engorgement.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Tweddle Child and Family Health Services

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