building blocks for a better start in life

1. mum’s milk
2. everyday counts
3. no rush to mush
4. taste for life
5. sweet as they are
6. baby moves

start 4 life
A good start for a healthy life
Happy, healthy babies start here

Welcome to Start4Life. We’re here to help you give your baby a healthier start in life.

What happens in your baby’s first years has a big effect on how healthy he or she will be in the future. Here are some Start4Life building blocks to help you know what’s right for your baby.

These are based on the very latest infant health research, so they may be different from advice that’s been around for a while. We now know much more about how things like mum’s milk can protect babies from bugs when they’re young. Combined with a healthy diet and activity, mum’s milk can also help prevent obesity later in life – and serious related illnesses like heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

If you have any questions about anything in this booklet or any concerns about your baby’s health, please contact your health visitor or GP.

The latest baby health research

- The World Health Organisation now recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months following a thorough review of scientific studies on the health, growth and development benefits of breastfeeding in 2001.
- The World Health Organisation review also found that babies’ digestive systems were not developed enough to cope with solid food before they were six months old.
- The review found no evidence of any benefits of introducing food earlier than six months and no deficits in growth of infants exclusively breastfed for six months.
Why mums are the baby milk experts

Your milk is perfect and uniquely made for your growing baby's needs. Giving your milk to your baby makes a big difference to both your baby's health and yours. Formula milk is made from cow's milk and other ingredients. It doesn't include the ingredients that help protect your baby from infection and disease. Only your body can make those.

There's lots of support available to help you with breastfeeding; just ask your midwife or health visitor.

A very special recipe

Mum's milk is packed full of disease-fighting antibodies to help protect babies from getting ill.

In the first few days after birth, mum's milk gives your baby a special infection-fighting booster called colostrum which can't be found anywhere else. And after the colostrum boost is over, mum's milk continues to give your baby the extra ability to fight germs by providing antibodies against any infections you or your baby have been in contact with.
Breastfeeding helps protect babies from

- Developing eczema
- Getting serious ear, chest and tummy bugs and having to go to hospital
- Being fussy about new foods
- Being constipated
- Being obese which means they are less likely to develop type 2 diabetes when they are older

It's great for mums too!

- Breastfeeding lowers your risk of getting breast cancer
- Breastfeeding lowers your risk of getting ovarian cancer
- Breastfeeding uses about 500 extra calories a day, making it easier to lose pregnancy weight
- Breastfeeding could save you money. Formula feeding can cost up to £45 a month!
- Breastfeeding is less hassle than formula. You don't have to clean and sterilise bottles, boil water and wait for the milk to cool, which really isn't fun for those night time and early morning feeds

True or false?
Lots of mums just can't breastfeed.

False. Only 2% of women are physically unable to breastfeed but many mums find it difficult because often they haven't had the help they might need. The good news is there are experts near you who can help you find the right way to hold and feed your baby. Ask your midwife or call the National Breastfeeding Helpline on 0300 100 0212*.
Getting help

Almost all mums are physically able to breastfeed, but it can take a little while to get the hang of it. It really helps to get someone to show you the right way to hold and feed your baby, like your midwife, health visitor or a breastfeeding peer supporter – she is a mum who has done it before and has had training to help you.

Don’t worry if you feel overwhelmed at first. It does get a lot easier. By about six weeks most babies settle down into a pattern and feed less often. And, if you need a break you can express milk so someone else can help.

Breastfeeding groups are a great way to make new friends as well as sharing the ups and downs of looking after a new baby. Don’t be afraid to ask for the support and information you need to make breastfeeding work for you. No problem is too small – if something is worrying you, the chances are other mothers will have felt the same.

Your health visitor, midwife or peer supporter is there to help. If you have any difficulties or worries call them straightaway.

Call the National Breastfeeding Helpline on 0300 100 0212*. A trained volunteer mother in your area, who will be able to give local help and information including details of your nearest breastfeeding group, will answer your call.

Go to www.nhs.uk/start4life or call Start4Life on 0300 123 1021* for more information on breastfeeding and lots of tips from mums and experts.

True or false?
It doesn’t make any difference if you top up your baby with formula after the first few days of breastfeeding.

False. Giving formula milk can reduce the protection your baby gets from your milk. The more mum’s milk they get, the more able they are to fight off germs and bugs.
every day counts

building block 2

How each day of mum's milk makes a difference to your baby's health

The latest research shows that each day and each week you continue to breastfeed, you're helping to protect your baby against infections and strengthening their ability to fight disease.

Each month of breastfeeding lowers the risk of illnesses that can put babies into hospital. It also helps protect babies against becoming overweight or obese, which means they are less likely to develop diseases like type 2 diabetes in the future.

Formula milk is an OK food for babies but it can't give your baby all this protection because it's not uniquely made for your baby. The longer you give your baby mum's milk, the more they benefit. Giving them only mum's milk for about 6 months, and then alongside solid foods after that, is ideal.

Useful tips

- Breastfeeding is a great opportunity to get closer to your baby as well as a good chance to sit down and relax. Or if you want to do something, grab a book or magazine, have a natter on the phone or watch TV.
- If you have to be away from your baby - for example, because your baby is ill or premature, or because you're going back to work - you can express milk so that somebody else can feed your baby.
- You'll probably feel quite thirsty. Have a drink beside you before you sit down to breastfeed.

You can get help from:

- Your midwife or health visitor
- The National Breastfeeding Helpline on 0300 100 0212*
no rush to mush
building block 3

3 signs that your baby is ready to start on solid foods

Research shows that starting solid food at the right time is important for your baby's health.

Some parents start feeding solid foods before their baby is ready. It's easy to mistake normal baby behaviour for an interest in food, but just because a baby is looking at food, feeding more regularly or waking during the night, it doesn't mean that they are ready for solids. There are 3 clear signs which, together, show it's time to start solids alongside mum's milk or formula.

Your baby is ready if they can:
1. Stay in a sitting position and hold their head steady.
2. Co-ordinate their eyes, hand and mouth and look at food, grab it and put it in their mouth all by themselves.
3. Swallow food. Babies who are not ready will push their food back out, so they get more round their face than they do in the mouths!

These signs usually appear together at around 6 months - rarely much earlier.

It's important to remember that if your baby is ready for solid food all 3 signs will be there.

Try the banana challenge!

If your baby is able to sit up with their head steady, reach out, grab a finger-sized piece of peeled, ripe banana, and eat some of it all by themselves, they are ready!
Why it's best not to give your baby solid food until they are ready

The latest research now shows that feeding babies solid food before they are ready can lead to gut infections that may need hospital treatment. That's because your baby is developing on the inside as well as the outside. We now know that it takes around 6 months for a baby's digestive system to work properly and cope well with solid food. Plus if you feed them mum's milk up to and beyond 6 months it gives them even more protection against infection.

Some baby foods may say 'from 4 months' but this is based on out-of-date research. Here's what health experts say today:

**Top tips**

- Don't worry if your baby starts waking in the night. They may be teething or having a hungry spell. Extra milk is all they need.
- And don't worry about having enough milk. Just feed your baby when they are hungry – your body will make more milk to keep up.
- Waiting till your baby is ready saves you a lot of time too as they will quickly be able to feed themselves. So you don’t have to spend ages holding out spoons, although there may still be a need to clear up the mess.
- Always stay with your baby when they are eating to make sure they don’t choke.
- You’ll find lots of helpful tips on what to feed your baby in building block 4 ‘taste for life’.

**True or false?**

Babies who are big for their age need solids earlier than other babies.

False. It's easy to see why people might think that, but this is generally not the case. Babies are ready for solids when their digestive systems are developed enough to cope at around six months. But every baby is an individual, so if you think yours is ready, try the banana challenge first.
Giving your baby a variety of food now may stop them turning into a fussy eater later

Babies like the food they get used to. Give them very salty, fatty or sweet foods and drinks when they are little and they are more likely to want them when they are older - and you've got yourself a fussy eater!

But if you give them lots of different healthy foods when they are little they are more likely to keep eating the good stuff as they grow. Healthy food now is great because it's really hard to change what they eat when they are older. Just ask any mum!

Top tips

Demonstrate

Babies copy their parents so you can help them by showing them you eat lots of different healthy foods.

3rd time lucky (or 4th or 5th...)

Don't give up if your baby doesn't like something at first. Babies like familiar foods and sometimes you need to offer a food 10-15 times before your baby will like it.

Finger feeds

It's a good idea to allow your baby to feed themselves using their fingers. This way they can show you how much they want to eat, and it gets them familiar with the different types of food.

Count what's in a week (not in a day)

Don't worry whether your baby has eaten enough in a meal or a day, but count up what they eat in a week.