introducing solid foods

Giving your baby a better start in life

unicef

start 4 life
A good start for a healthier life
Start4Life is an initiative to help you give your baby a healthier start in life. There are 6 Start4Life building blocks, based on the latest infant health research:

**The Start4Life building blocks**

1. **mum's milk**
   - Why mums are the milk experts!

2. **every day counts**
   - How each day of mum’s milk makes a difference to your baby’s health

3. **no rush to mush**
   - How to tell if your baby is ready for solid foods

4. **taste for life**
   - How to give your baby an appetite for healthier foods

5. **sweet as they are**
   - How to avoid giving your baby a sweet tooth

6. **baby moves**
   - Helping your little one to be active and healthy

For more information please visit [www.nhs.uk/start4life](http://www.nhs.uk/start4life) or refer to the ‘Building blocks for a better start in life’ booklet (product code: C4L176).
starting your baby on solid foods

Introducing your baby to solid foods, often called weaning onto foods, should start when your baby is around 6 months old.

It's a really important step in your baby's development and it can be great fun to explore new flavours and textures together. This booklet is here to help guide you through this exciting time, so you can be sure you're giving your baby a healthy start in life.

To begin with, how much your baby takes is less important than getting them used to the idea of eating. They will still be getting most of their nutrition from milk. Babies don't need three meals a day to start with, so you can start by offering foods at a time that suits you both.

Gradually, you'll be able to increase the amount and variety of food your baby eats until they can eventually eat the same as the rest of the family, in smaller portions.
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no rush to mush

Starting at around 6 months

The latest research reviewed by the World Health Organization shows that babies need nothing but mum's milk or infant formula for the first 6 months of life. This gives a baby's digestive system time to develop so that they cope fully with solid foods. This includes solid food made into purees and cereals added to milk.

Why it pays to wait until they're ready

If you are breastfeeding, feeding only mum's milk up to around 6 months will give them extra protection against infection, and it will continue to protect them for as long as you carry on.

Whether your baby has mum's milk or infant formula, waiting till your baby is ready for food will save a lot of time too, as they will quickly be able to feed themselves and with less mess, as they'll be able to swallow properly.

First foods

From around 6 months your baby's first foods can include soft cooked vegetables like parsnip, potato, yam, sweet potato or carrot. Soft fresh fruit like banana, avocado, peach or melon are good too. Babies often like to start eating these by having them as finger foods, or mashed. You can also spoon-feed your baby, although they will soon be able to do it for themselves.

Keep feeding mum's milk or infant formula as well, but don't give cow's milk as a drink until they are 1 year old.

Finger foods

Finger food is food that's cut up into pieces big enough for your baby to hold in their fist and stick out of the top of it - pieces about the size of your own finger work well. Your baby learns to chew this way.
no rush to mush

3 signs your baby is ready for their first food

Every baby is an individual, but there are 3 clear signs which, together, show your baby is ready for these types of first solid foods alongside mum's milk or infant 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 so that they can look at the food, pick it up 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 their mouths!

It's rare for these signs to appear together before 6 months.

See the safety and hygiene section on page 16.
Some signs mistaken for a baby being ready for solid foods

• Chewing fists
• Waking in the night when they have previously slept through
• Wanting extra milk feeds

These are normal baby behaviours and not necessarily a sign of hunger, nor being ready to start solid food. Starting solid foods will not make them any more likely to sleep through. Sometimes a little extra milk will help until they are ready for food.

True or false?
Babies who are big for their age need solid foods earlier than other babies.

False. It's easy to see why people might think that. But remember, it's what's going on inside that counts. Babies are ready for solid foods when their digestive systems are developed enough to cope – and this is usually at around 6 months.

But every baby is an individual so if you think yours is ready, speak to a member of your health visiting team.
Here's a handy guide to what foods you should give:

**From 0-6 months**
Mum's milk or infant formula.
'Follow on' formula is definitely not suitable for babies under six months. You don't need to introduce it after six months either.

**From 6 months**
*First foods:* mashed or soft cooked sticks of fruit and vegetables like parsnip, potato, yam, sweet potato, carrot, apple or pear, all cooled before eating. Or try soft peach or melon, or grabbable bits of soft ripe banana or avocado. Or baby rice mixed with your baby's usual milk.
*Next foods:* soft cooked meat such as chicken, mashed fish (check very carefully for any bones), pasta, noodles, toast, pieces of chapati, lentils, rice and mashed hard boiled eggs. Also, full fat dairy products such as yoghurt, fromage frais or custard (choose products with no added sugar or less sugar). Cow's milk can be used in cooking or mixed with food from 6 months.
*Cups:* introduce a cup from around 6 months and offer sips of water with meals. Using an open cup or a free-flow cup without a valve will help your baby learn to sip and is better for your baby's teeth.

**From 8-9 months**
Gradually, in this time, your baby will move towards eating 3 meals a day. It will be a mixture of finger foods, mashed and chopped foods.

**From 12 months**
Your baby will now be eating 3 meals a day, chopped if required, plus mum's milk or cow's milk and healthier snacks like fruit, vegetable sticks or toast and rice cakes. They can now drink whole cow's milk and have full fat dairy products. Choose full fat because children under 2 need the extra fat and vitamins in full fat dairy products. From 2 years old if they are a good eater and growing well they can have semi-skimmed milk. From 5 years old, 1% or skimmed milk is ok.
Getting started

- Let your baby enjoy touching and holding the food
- Always stay with your baby when they're eating in case they choke
- Don't force your baby – wait until the next time if they are not interested this time
- Your baby can feed themselves using their own fingers, as soon as they show an interest
- If you're using a spoon, wait for your baby to open their mouth before you offer the food. Your baby may like to hold a spoon too
- Start by offering just a few pieces or teaspoons of food, once a day
- If the food is hot, allow it to cool and test it before giving it to your baby
- Don't add salt, sugar or stock cubes to your baby's food or cooking water.

What milk when?

Only mum's milk or infant formula for around the first 6 months
Then mum's milk or infant formula alongside food from 6-12 months
Cow's milk can be mixed with food from 6 months
Whole cow's milk can be given as a drink from 1 year
Carry on with mum's milk for as long as you both want.

Try this

Start by offering cooked vegetables, soft pieces of fruit or a small amount of mashed fruit or vegetable. Try it after a milk feed (or try in the middle of one) and see what works best for your baby.

True or false?

My baby needs to start eating before I go back to work.

False. Your baby can begin eating food any time you are together to fit in around your work. They will soon get the hang of it.