Weaning
Starting solid food
The information in this leaflet will help you wean your baby onto solid foods.

Your baby’s development from breast or formula milk feeding to sharing in the family meal is one of the first stages of growing up.

Enjoy it. Encourage it. Don’t force it.

Let it happen at its own pace, and if you have any worries talk to your health visitor.
What is weaning?

Weaning means introducing a range of foods gradually until your baby is eating the same foods as the rest of your family.

Until six months, your baby needs only breastmilk or infant formula milk. Around six months your baby needs more than milk alone and is able to eat solid foods in addition to breast or formula milk.
When to start

At about six months babies are ready to be moved onto a mixed diet.

Try giving solid foods when your baby:
• can sit up
• wants to chew and is putting toys and other objects in their mouth
• reaches and grabs accurately.

It is normal for babies aged three to five months to begin waking in the night when they have previously slept through. It is not necessarily a sign of hunger and starting solids will not make your baby more likely to sleep through the night again.

IMPORTANT
Never leave your baby alone when eating.
Health experts agree that around six months is the best age for introducing solids. Before this, your baby’s digestive system is still developing and weaning too soon may increase the risk of infections and allergies. Weaning is also easier at six months. If your baby seems hungrier at any time before six months, they may be having a growth spurt, and extra breast or formula milk will be enough to meet their needs.

If you decide to wean at any time before six months, there are some foods that should be avoided as they may cause allergies or make your baby ill. These include wheat-based foods and other foods containing gluten (e.g. bread, rusks, some breakfast cereals), eggs, fish, shellfish, nuts, seeds and soft and unpasteurised cheeses. Ask your health visitor for advice, especially if your baby was premature.

Solid foods should never be introduced before four months.
How to start

Start by offering a small amount of mashed vegetable, fruit or cereal mixed with milk after a milk feed or in the middle of one, if this works better. If the food is hot, allow it to cool, stir it and test it before giving it to your baby.

Some babies take time to learn to eat new foods. Your baby will be finding out about different tastes and textures and learning that food doesn’t come in a continuous flow. Be patient, let your baby touch the food if they want to, and be prepared for some mess.

- Start by offering just a few teaspoons of food, once a day.
- Use a little of your baby’s usual milk (breast or formula) to mix the food to the desired consistency.
- Allow your baby to feed themselves, using their fingers, as soon as they show an interest.
- Give your baby a range of foods and textures to taste.
- Don’t force feed your baby. If your baby doesn’t seem to want it, wait and try again later.
- If you are using a spoon, wait for your baby to open their mouth when the food is offered.
- Let your baby touch the food in the dish or on the spoon.
- If you are bottle feeding, don’t add any foods (including rusks, cereal or sugar) to the milk.

HANDY HINT

Make sure your baby is sitting up straight and is facing forward. A highchair is best. This way your baby is able to explore foods better and will be less likely to choke.
First foods

You could try:

- cereals such as baby rice mixed with milk
- mashed cooked vegetables such as parsnip, potato, yam, sweet potato or carrot
- mashed banana, avocado, cooked apple or pear
- pieces of soft fruit or vegetables small enough for your baby to pick up.

Use mashed-up family food when you can. It’s best to cook your own food for your baby. This way, you’ll know the ingredients of the food and you’ll be getting your baby used to eating what you eat. Don’t add salt or sugar to food for your baby.

HANDY HINT
Allow plenty of time for feeding, particularly at first. Don’t rush or force feed your baby. Most babies know when they’ve had enough to eat. Be patient, and go at your baby’s pace.