feeding your baby
from breastfeeding to solid foods
This booklet gives practical advice about feeding your baby. Breast milk provides all the nutrients that a baby needs for healthy development in the first months of life. So even if you only breastfeed for a few weeks, your baby will benefit. When you start to introduce solid food, this booklet can give you advice on how to do it, which foods you can try and which foods you should avoid.

Q: What are the benefits of breastfeeding?

A: As well as providing all the nutrients a baby needs in the first few months, breast milk:

- is easy for a baby to digest
- prevents constipation
- is hygienic
- contains antibodies that help babies fight infections

There is also mounting evidence that, in the long term, breastfed babies have several advantages in terms of health and development.
If you choose not to breastfeed, infant formula is the only alternative to breast milk. Your baby will need breast milk or formula milk until they’re at least a year old. Doorstep (cows') milk is not suitable as a main drink until a baby is a year old. (See What about drinks? on page 13.)

Q When should I start giving my baby solid foods?

A Don’t give your baby solid food before he or she is 4 months old (or before the 17th week after they were born). From 6 months old, you can gradually increase the amount of solid food you give your baby so that, between the ages of 6 and 12 months, solid foods become the main part of your baby’s diet, with breast or formula milk making up the balance. Remember that doorstep (cows’) milk is not suitable as a main drink for babies under a year old.

When you start giving your baby solid foods, you will gradually be introducing them to a wide range of non-milk foods, so that they will be eating a varied diet by the time they are a year old.

But remember that all babies are different. Some start solid foods earlier, some later. Some take to it quickly, and some take longer. Some are choosy, others seem to like everything.

Here are some suggestions to make this process easier and safer:

Go at your baby’s pace. Allow plenty of time for feeding, particularly at first. Your baby needs to learn to move solid food from the front of the tongue to the back, to swallow it. The food is going to taste and feel different — so it’s bound to take time.

Spoon out the amount you think your baby will eat and heat this, rather than heating a large amount that then goes to waste. This is because you’ll need to throw away any of the heated food that your baby doesn’t eat, because it’s not safe to reheat previously warmed food. It’s important to heat food thoroughly and allow it to cool, then stir well and test, before offering it to your baby. Also, don’t refreeze any food that’s been warmed or previously frozen. And remember that everything you use for feeding your baby needs to be really clean.

Keep a close eye on your baby when he or she is eating to make sure that they don’t choke.

Don’t rush or ‘force feed’. Most babies know when they’ve had enough to eat. Don’t spend a lot of time persuading your baby to take food — they soon learn that refusing food is a good way of getting attention.

Choose the right time. Ideally, choose a time of day when both you and your baby are relaxed.

Encourage your baby to help with feeding. When your baby shows an interest in feeding him or herself, this is a good sign. So encourage this by giving your baby the spoon, while you try to spoon in most of the meal with another spoon. It will be messy at first, but try not to worry about it.
Offer a wide variety of foods that you and your family usually eat, because this might help avoid choosiness later on. Avoid giving your baby eggs, or salty, sugary, or processed foods, that haven’t been specifically designed for babies. (See What foods should be avoided? on page 10.) Aim to encourage your baby to eat a variety of family foods and adapt to your pattern of eating.

Use mashed-up family food when you can. This way, you’ll know the ingredients of the food, and you’ll be getting your baby used to eating what you eat. Commercial baby foods can be useful, but don’t let them replace family foods altogether.

Remember, doorstep (cows’) milk isn’t suitable as a main drink for babies under a year old.

How should I introduce solid foods?

A

It’s best to think of this process in four stages.

Stage 1

When you introduce solid foods, start by mixing a teaspoon of one of the following with your baby’s usual milk (breast or formula):

- smooth vegetable puree such as carrot, parsnip, potato or yam
- fruit purée such as banana, cooked apple, pear or mango
- cereal (not wheat-based) such as baby rice, sago, maize, cornmeal, or millet

Offer this to your baby before or after one of your usual milk feeds, or in the middle of a feed, if that works better. If the food is hot, make sure you stir it and test it before giving it to your baby.

Most babies take time to learn how to take food from a spoon. So be patient and be prepared for some mess. Your baby may cry at first between mouthfuls – until now, food has come in one continuous stream, but now there are frustrating pauses.

Don’t press the food on your baby. If he or she really doesn’t seem to want the food, stop and wait until next time. The main aim at this stage is to get your baby used to the idea of taking food from a spoon. He or she will still be getting most of their nourishment from breast or formula milk (around 500 to 600 ml a day).
Stage 2
Feeds will still be mainly breast or formula milk (around 500 to 600 ml a day). But when you're both ready, you can start very gradually increasing the amount of solid food you give, either before, during, or after the milk feed. Try to react to your baby's appetite, so if he or she is still hungry, you can give a little more.

At the same time, you can move gradually from solid food at one feed in the day, to solid food at two, and then three feeds.

You can give your baby full-fat cows' milk products, such as yoghurt or cheese sauce, as a solid food. (See Doorstep (cows') milk under What about drinks? on page 13.)

Try to give cereals to your baby just once a day. Start adding different foods and different tastes. You'll be able to use lots of the foods you already cook for yourself. Just mash, sieve, or purée a small amount, but remember, don't add any salt or sugar.

Using your own food is cheaper than buying baby foods, you'll know what the ingredients are, and your baby will get used to eating like the rest of the family. Preparing larger quantities than you need and freezing small portions for later, for example in an ice cube tray, can save time and effort.

More first foods to try
As well as the vegetable, fruit and cereal purées, you can add other foods, such as:
- purées of meat (including liver) and poultry
- purées of lentils (dahl) or split pulses, hummus
- full-fat milk products, such as yoghurt or fromage frais – unless you've been advised otherwise by your health visitor or GP

Full-fat cows' milk can also be used for cooking, for example in cheese sauce, but avoid giving cows' milk to your baby as a drink until after he or she is a year old.

Stage 3
As solid food becomes a large part of your baby's diet, it's important to offer a range of different foods. This is to provide your baby with all the vitamins and minerals he or she needs. Your baby should still be having a minimum of 500 to 600 ml of breast or formula milk a day.

Try to give your baby two to three servings a day of starchy foods such as potatoes, yams, rice or bread. Fruit and vegetables make good finger foods and should be included at two or more meals each day. Your baby should have one serving of soft cooked meat, fish, egg, tofu or pulses such as beans or lentils (dahl) a day. Red meat (beef, lamb and pork) and liver are excellent sources of iron. Eggs (well-cooked) are a quick, nutritious and cheap source of protein.

As your baby continues to develop, you can introduce foods with a thicker consistency and a lumpier texture, to