



Weaning your Child



During the first year, a baby grows more quickly than at any other time in his or her life. This rapid period of growth means that babies need a lot of energy and nutrients to ensure that they can grow well.

Initially, babies only need breast milk, or a suitable formula milk, but, as they get older, they need to have other sources of nutrition to help with growth and development. It can be great fun introducing your baby to new tastes and they will be keen to join in with the family's meals.

What is weaning?

Weaning is the introduction of solid foods into the diet of a baby who is drinking breast milk or formula milk. It is a gradual process but, by the time they are one year old, most children will be eating chopped, mashed family food.

Why should we wean children?

We need to wean children so they are able to get all of the nutrients they need from the foods they eat. Biting and chewing help to develop the muscles needed for speech development.

At, or around, six months old, a child's body stores of some nutrients, such as iron, start to run out. Therefore, it is important that when cow's milk is introduced as the main drink at one year old, babies should be eating a varied diet, which meets their nutritional requirements.

When should I wean my child?

The Department of Health recommends exclusive breastfeeding until six months (26 weeks) of age; all infants, breastfed and formula fed, should be weaned at six months.

Some parents, however, may wish to wean earlier, and four months, or 17 weeks, should still be considered as the earliest age that weaning on to solids should be started. Babies who are born pre-term need to be weaned according to their individual needs, and advice should be sought from the dietitian and the medical team.



What kind of foods should be used?

Weaning foods are often introduced in stages. On the next page is a table of the different stages, and what foods should be used. The ages are approximate and will depend on when weaning is first started; every baby is different and will

develop at his or her own pace. But it is important to keep offering different tastes and textures through their first year.

What about drinks?

Breast fed babies do not need any additional drinks, but formula fed babies may need some extra water (cooled boiled water) in hot weather. There is no need for babies to be offered juices, as even juices with natural sugars can cause tooth decay. After six months, babies should be offered regular breast feeds. If they are being formula fed they should be offered 500-600ml of suitable infant formula.



Is it okay to use commercial baby foods?

It is best for children to be weaned on to the foods that the family eat. Children who only eat commercial baby foods may not like family foods once they are offered.

However, some commercial baby foods can be incorporated into the weaning diet, and many parents find them convenient.

Which foods should be avoided?

Salt: Up to seven months, a baby should eat less than 1g of salt per day (breastmilk and formula milks contain the right amount of salt). Between seven months and one year, 1g of salt per day is the maximum. Salt should not be added to foods, and salty foods, such as bacon, cheese and some processed foods, should be limited.

Sugar: Avoid adding any sugar to foods and drinks for babies. **Honey:** Honey should not be given to children under 1 year.

Nuts: Nuts can be given from around six months old, if they are finely ground. Children under 5 years should not have whole nuts because of the risk of choking and inhalation.

Is it safe to wean onto a vegetarian or vegan diet?

Children can grow and develop normally on a vegetarian or vegan diet, although more attention needs to be given to ensure that nutritional needs are met. Vegetarian and vegan diets can be high in fibre, and this can lead to lower energy

(calorie) intake, and reduced absorption of some important minerals, such as iron and zinc. All children between six months and five years old could benefit from taking drops containing vitamins A, C and D, but vegan children additionally need vitamin B12. A health visitor or paediatric dietitian can give specific advice on weaning onto a vegetarian or vegan diet.

Who should I contact for help and advice on weaning?

Initially contact your health visitor for advice about weaning. If you are continuing to have problems weaning your child onto solids you should speak to your GP or a Paediatric Dietitian.

Table of Weaning Stages

| Stage | Age Range | Consistency | Foods |
|---------|---|--|--|
| Stage 1 | Six months (26 weeks) No earlier than four months (17 weeks) | Smooth pureed foods. | Fruit, vegetables, rice, potatoes, yam, meat, yoghurt, cheese and custard (before six months foods should be gluten free). |
| Stage 2 | Six - nine months | Thicker consistency with some lumps; soft finger foods can also be introduced at this stage. | Fruit, vegetables, rice, potatoes, yam, meat, fish, pulses, eggs, yoghurt, custard, cheese, bread and cereals. |
| Stage 3 | Nine - twelve months | Mashed, chopped, minced consistency; more finger foods | Fruit, vegetables, rice, potatoes, yam, meat, fish, pulses, eggs, yoghurt, custard, cheese, bread and cereals. |
| Stage 4 | Twelve months and older | Mashed, chopped family foods and a variety of finger foods. | Fruit, vegetables, rice, potatoes, yam, meat, fish, pulses, eggs, yoghurt, custard, cheese, bread and cereals. |

This Food Fact sheet is a public service of The British Dietetic Association intended for information only.

It is not a substitute for proper medical diagnosis or dietary advice given by a dietitian.

To check that your dietitian is registered check www.hpc-uk.org.

Other Food Fact sheets are available from www.bda.uk.com

© BDA June 2007. This food fact sheet is based on the Paediatric Group of the British Dietetic Association Position Statement on breastfeeding and weaning onto solid foods. Written by Elaine Farrell on behalf of the BDA Paediatric Group. Updated March 2011

*Trust a dietitian
To know about nutrition*

© The British Dietetic Association