

PREPARING TO WEAN!

So it's almost time to start giving your child something other than milk. Getting ready for solids can seem like a minefield for many parents as there is a lot of conflicting advice about the 'best approach'. However, fully preparing and knowing what to expect can really help. This fact sheet is here to help you get off to the best start.

I'm Ready! The Signs

First up, you'll probably start weaning your child at around 6 months of age. Some people start earlier but the science shows that it's best to wait - feeding them too early (particularly before 4 months) has been linked to increased risk of gut, lung and ear infections.¹

All children are different so once they hit that 6 month mark it needn't be bang - foods out. Look out for the signs - some children will ready a bit before and some after the 6 months. BUT in terms of timescale this is likely to be days or weeks rather than months. So, here are some of the tell-tale signs that your child could be ready to eat some real grub² (Table 1).



Table 1: Ready to start eating?

Signs - Time to Start Solids:
They can sit up.
They can hold their head steady.
They can pick up food and navigate it to their mouth.
They can swallow food.
Other Signs (These may indicate readiness to wean BUT could also be signs of something else, such as teething or growing):
They are chewing their fists.
They are waking in the night more.
They are wanting more milk.

What's in a name?

You may hear 'weaning' be referred to as 'complementary feeding' or simply 'introducing solids'. This is because the term weaning can cause confusion and many people see this as a time to "wean" babies off their milk.

In fact for the first few months of weaning your baby is likely to still having similar amounts of milk alongside the introduction of new 'tastes' of solid foods. The World Health Organization³ has some useful information about the pace at which foods should be introduced (Table 2). The transition period where a baby goes from exclusive breast or formula feeding gradually onto family foods actually covers a window of 12-24 months.³ So this is ultimately why the term complementary feeding is now used rather than weaning. History lesson over!

If your baby is showing **a number of signs on a number of occasions**, it may be time to get the first foods out.



Table 2: Food pacing.^{3,4}

Age	New foods³	Milk⁴
6 to 8 months	2-3 times a day.	About 600ml per day
9 to 11 months	3-4 times a day	About 600-400ml per day
1-2 years	3-4 times a day + 1-2 nutritious snacks.	About 400ml full fat cows' milk or another suitable animal milk. Be mindful when using milk alternatives as these may be lower in energy than cows' milk. Milk alternatives used should be unsweetened and fortified.
2 years+	Eating the same as rest of the family.	About 300ml milk. Ensure alternatives are unsweetened and fortified.

Getting Equipped

Once baby starts showing those tell-tale signs that it's time to begin eating some real food, you might want to start thinking about the equipment that you'll need. This can sometimes be overwhelming, as there are so many products available, but actually there are only a few pieces of equipment that can come in handy when you begin to offer solid foods (Table 3).

Table 3: Equipment for Infant Feeding

Equipment	Why is this useful?
Plastic bowls/plates and cutlery (fork and spoon will do at this stage).	Plastic ones are ideal as they don't heat up too much and won't get broken every time they are hurled on the floor.
Ice cube trays and small storage pots.	These can be really handy. If you cook pureés and first foods in bulk you can then freeze some for later. On days when you are busy – bingo! Just pull them out of the freezer.
A hand blender.	This can be useful early on in weaning or if you are making soups and sauces.
A high chair or baby seat.	This is essential to help prop them in place, prevent them from running off and so they can join the family at mealtimes.
Bibs, muslins, splash mats & plenty of cleaning cloths.	Mess prevention!
A free-flowing beaker or open cup.	To help children learn to sip and drink from open cups.
A small saucepan.	For cooking up veggies and meals from scratch.

Other equipment that may be useful (but not necessary) includes a steamer, a food thermometer or colour changing spoons, ice packs for taking food out and about and a lunchbox.

Create a Food Sanctuary



When first offering solid foods to your baby, remember that it's a brand new experience for them. This means that getting the environment right can really help for those first few meals to go nice and smoothly.

So, choose a time of day that suits you and baby – with minimal distractions and also when they are neither too tired, too hungry nor too full. Once you've decided on a time of day, try and stick to roughly that time each day and simply build other meals in around it.

Make it happy and light. Babies are very good at picking up on signs of distress or anxiety from their parents. This means if you're nervous about starting your baby onto solids, they can become anxious about it too. So, staying calm, relaxed and giving them a big smile can help to jig your little one into happy feeding mode.



Conclusions

Knowing when and how to start introducing solid foods can be a minefield. However, getting yourself prepared and knowing the best way to start can make your first experience of introducing solid foods more enjoyable all round. So get equipped, buy in the first foods and have fun with it. And yes - be prepared to get splatted at some point!

Top Tips for If You're Ready to Wean

1. Is your child 6 months? If they are younger than this think about whether they really are ready to wean - perhaps the signs reflect teething or growing.
2. Think about introducing solid foods as an adventure for you both - take the pressure off.
3. Weaning is less about how much they eat and more about offering them new flavour experiences.
4. You don't need a whole heap of equipment - just the basics when you begin.
5. Pick a time of day that suits your current routine but when your baby is not too tired or hungry.
6. Talk to them when you feed them, about things in general but also about what they are eating.

Please note

This fact sheet has been based on scientific evidence available at the time that it was written. The information contained in this commentary is not a substitute for medical advice or treatment. We recommend consultation with your doctor or health care professional if you have any concerns around your child's health.

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Further Information: www.littlefoodie.org

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References

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