



## Introduce your Baby to Solid Foods

**Your baby only needs breast milk or formula for the first 6 months of life. If your baby seems hungrier after 4 months be aware that giving them solids this early won't help them to sleep better and recommended guidance is to give more milk feeds until your child is developmentally ready for solids (at around 6 months).**

- By about 6 months of age you will know if your baby is ready for solids if they are able to sit up in a chair and hold their head up, grab and hold food and put it in their mouth, and swallow food they have in their mouth rather than just spit it out. If you think your baby is ready for food before 5 months, or is not showing signs of readiness by 7 months, talk to your Health Visitor.
- Breast milk (or formula milk) will still provide important energy and nutrients for your baby between 6 and 12 months, and the food you offer will be 'complementary' to this, increasing in volume until after 1 year of age; food then becomes the most important part of the diet. Babies should be offered 3 meals a day and breastfed babies will always take the exact amount of milk they need alongside this; formula fed babies will need about 600ml/day at 7-9 months and 400ml/day at 10-12 months.

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**For additional fact sheets see [www.ihv.org.uk](http://www.ihv.org.uk)**

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## How to introduce your Baby to Solid Foods

- All babies are different: some will take an active part in meal times from the beginning and will feed themselves and be keen to try new textures quickly. Others may go at a slower pace and need some help getting food into their mouths via a spoon. Be responsive to your baby, and give them as much independence as you can. Remember also that as your little one gets used to new textures it's quite common for them to gag on their food. Always supervise your baby or toddler when they are eating and make sure you know what to do if you think your baby is choking – our [fact sheet on choking](#) explains more.
- Offer a range of savoury flavours to start with and remember that if your baby 'makes a face' or turns their head away these are natural reactions to a new taste, it doesn't mean that they won't learn to enjoy a particular food in time.

### Key things to remember when introducing new tastes and textures and solid food are:

- Offer small amounts at a time and a variety of colours and flavours
- Return to foods that have been rejected previously as children will change their taste preferences over time as they become familiar with new foods
- Babies can move swiftly from smooth to mashed to chopped food after 6 months of age and should be given the opportunity to hold finger foods and feed themselves at every meal
- Babies can eat a wide range of foods and can have meals containing foods such as meat; fish; peas; beans and lentils; eggs; ground nuts and seeds; starchy roots (such as potato and yam); cereals (such as bread, rice and pasta) and all types of vegetables and fruits from 6 months of age. Ideas on foods and meals to offer, and the right size of portion to give, can be found in the 'More Information' section of this fact sheet
- Never add salt (or stock cubes or sauces such as soy sauce or ketchup) to your baby's food, these can cause damage to your child's kidneys. The same goes for sugar, which can cause tooth decay (as well as giving your little one a 'taste' for sugary, unhealthy foods)

and honey, which can sometimes contain bacteria which produces toxins in a baby's intestines, leading to infant botulism, a very serious illness

- Avoid giving babies snack foods, sweet foods and any foods designed for older children or adults. Breast milk and all infant formulas are gluten-free so introducing solid food is the first time an infant will take in any gluten. Any food that contains gluten should not be given before six months. This advice applies for all babies regardless of whether there is a family history of coeliac disease. There is no evidence to suggest that delaying the introduction of gluten beyond six months of age is of any benefit
- Babies are at greater risk of food poisoning as their immune system is still developing, so make sure that meat, fish and eggs are well cooked and that foods such as raw shellfish or unpasteurised milk are avoided
- Commercial baby food is often poor value for money and is usually sweeter, smoother and less interesting and nutritious than food you can make cheaply at home. Babies do not require 'baby snacks' or need any drinks other than milk or water in the first year of life. Offer your child a drink of water with every meal, using a beaker or cup. 'Training' cups with a free-flow lid (without a non-spill valve) are a good idea and much better for your child than a bottle or beaker with a teat, which have a very slow flow
- Meal times may be messy with babies, but letting them get involved in eating is important. Try to stay relaxed and enjoy meals with your baby, remembering that some days they will eat more, and some days less. Rejecting something you have made especially for them is not personal!

### More information:

Healthy Start:  
[bit.ly/1jusLvR](https://bit.ly/1jusLvR)

Start4Life:  
[bit.ly/1i1QKY9](https://bit.ly/1i1QKY9)

First Steps Nutrition Trust:  
[bit.ly/1q4W9hD](https://bit.ly/1q4W9hD)