



## Introducing your baby to solid foods

**Your baby needs only breastmilk 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 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.
- Breastmilk (or infant formula) 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, by 1 year of age, food then becomes the most important part of the diet. When babies start to eat solids, they 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 about 400ml/day at 10-12 months.

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

The information in this resource was updated on 15/03/2022.

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- 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. Babies may sometimes gag when they are starting to eat solid food - this is a normal part of learning a new skill. 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 – for further information, please refer to the iHV Parent Tip - Preventing Choking: <https://bit.ly/3GhDwTj>.
- 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, 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, from 6 months of age, can have meals containing 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. 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, as these may be too high in sugar, salt, additives or other ingredients.
- There is no need to delay the introduction of gluten, peanuts or other foods that are linked to allergies beyond 6 months of age, even if there is a family history of allergies. However, it is sensible to introduce gluten, ground nuts or nut butters, crushed seeds or seed butters, eggs, fish and shellfish one at a time to start with. If babies have been exclusively breastfed, this also applies to cows’ milk and other dairy products.
- Babies are at greater risk of food poisoning as their immune system is still developing, so make sure that meat and fish are well cooked and that foods such as raw shellfish or unpasteurised dairy products are avoided. Eggs can be served runny if they have a British Lion Mark stamp on them.
- 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. Choose a cup that is free flow (without a non-spill valve) so that your child doesn't have to suck the contents across their teeth.
- 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!

## Further information:

Healthy Start: <https://bit.ly/3ALYcBM>

Start4Life: <https://bit.ly/3gybskc>

First Steps Nutrition Trust: <https://bit.ly/3GzLk34>

NHS (Baby food allergies): <https://bit.ly/3Jbl0ho>

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