

When should you start weaning your baby?



Many parents are given conflicting advice about weaning their babies onto solid foods. But when is the best time to start?

Share this guidance with parents and carers

A The official advice from the NHS is that parents should start weaning their babies onto solid food from around the age of six months. It should be introduced around six months alongside breast milk or formula.

Weaning is a key milestone within the first 1,001 critical days, influencing children's eating habits and their health later in life and improving babies' abilities to move food around their mouth, chew and swallow.

When to start weaning

When to wean babies is seen as such an important topic that the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) has launched a campaign to promote NHS advice on weaning after a survey found that 40% of first-time parents introduced solid food before their babies are five months old – earlier than the NHS recommendation of around six months. Almost two-thirds of parents (64%) say they have received conflicting advice on what age to start weaning.

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What is weaning?

Introducing babies to solid foods is sometimes called complementary feeding because babies are still being milk fed as well – either with breast milk or formula.

Why should weaning start at six months?

Breast milk or first infant formula provides all the energy and nutrients needed until around the baby is around six months old. Waiting gives your baby time to develop so they can cope fully with solid foods. It also means that the baby will be more able to feed themselves.

By six months old, babies will be better at moving food around their mouth, chewing and swallowing – this may mean they can have mashed, lumpy and finger foods.

How will I know if my baby is ready to start trying solid foods?

There are three signs to look out for which when they appear from around six months of age, show that your baby is ready for their

first solid foods, alongside their usual milk feed:

- being able to stay in a sitting position, holding their head steady
- being co-ordinated enough to look at their food, pick it up and put it in their mouth.
- being able to swallow food (rather than spit it back out)

Sometimes parents notice babies chewing their fists, wanting extra milk and waking up in the night (more than usual) and take these as signs that the child is hungry and needs to start on solid foods. However, these aren't necessarily a sign of hunger or being ready to be weaned. They are often just normal behaviours. Giving extra milk will help to fill them up until the right time comes for them to start eating solid food.

If your baby was born prematurely, you should ask your health visitor or GP for advice on when to start weaning.

Find out more

For more advice and tips for families visit familycorner.co.uk.