

What is baby-led weaning?

Baby-led weaning means offering your baby finger foods and letting them feed themselves (rather than spoon feeding them puréed or mashed foods). The baby controls the amount of solid food they eat. Some parents prefer baby-led to spoon feeding where as others prefer to use a combination of both. There's no right or wrong way.

When can I start baby-led weaning?

As with traditional weaning baby led can be introduced from 6 months. A baby should be able to sit up unaided and hold their head well before they are given finger foods. This helps with swallowing and reduces the chance of choking. Remember all babies develop at different rates, some babies may be around 7 months, some older before they have finger foods.

Preparing finger foods

- Take out pips, seeds and stones
- Peel skins at first
- Start with finger sized strips that will stick out top of baby's fist
- As the baby develops the pincer grip they will be able to pick up smaller bits of food
- Start with finger foods that mash in the mouth. When they can manage these well move on to other soft finger food with more texture, then to firmer foods

How to start

- Start with soft finger foods (see page 2 for suggestions)
- Have your baby sitting in an upright position, and don't leave them unattended whilst eating
- You don't need to use plates and bowls, you can put the food straight onto the highchair tray
- It is important not to rush your baby or to try to make them finish a certain amount or eat a specific food. Its up to them how much or little they want to eat.

The Benefits:

- Encourages self-feeding early on
- Reduces the time spent preparing foods
- Allows babies to join in with family meals more easily from the start – mealtimes are a social experience
- If babies aren't keen on lumps at first finger foods can help them learn to bite and chew
- Helps introduce different flavors and textures. Low sugar finger foods make ideal healthy snacks as well as an important addition to meals

Finger Food ideas:

Foods that mash in mouth:

Slices of soft ripe fresh fruit
e.g. banana, avocado
Tinned pear slices in natural juice
Steamed or boiled veg e.g. tender carrot sticks or potato
Buttered toast fingers - no crusts

Food that needs more chomp

Melon slices
Plain cooked pasta shapes
Chopped kiwi
Roasted veg sticks e.g. sweet potato
Mini unsalted rice cakes
Pitta Bread
Broccoli

Firmer Textures

Peeled cucumber sticks
Cooked and cooled green beans
Quartered hard boiled eggs
Strips of cooked meat
Mini Sandwiches
Halved or chopped cherry tomatoes
Chunks of cooked fish

Top tips to remember:

- Don't worry about how much food your baby is eating. Most of their nutrients still come from their milk (breast or formula) during the early stages of weaning
- If you choose baby led remember that it is controlled by your baby so don't give into temptation to put the food into their mouth for them. Your role is to let them explore and develop at their own pace, and to provide nutritious food shaped for their developmental stage
- Serve a variety of tastes and textures to get them used to a variety of foods. This will reduce the risk of them becoming fussy as they get older.
- Let them pick up the food with their fingers – they will only pick up foods they can manage. At this age their gag reflex is triggered towards the front of the tongue. This is why finger foods are great from 6 months as they can learn to chew and swallow safely
- Don't overwhelm them with too many options at the start. It is a success even if they only try a couple of pieces of food
- Tinned fruit and vegetables are fine to give your baby - just make sure tinned fruit is in their own juice, and vegetables don't have added salt
- Ensure dairy products are full fat and pasteurized
- Remember all babies develop at different paces - don't worry if your baby is eating different food and textures to others their age

Useful Resources:

- **First Steps Nutrition Trust**
- **Wean the weanz**
- **Fun First Foods**
- **NHS start4life**
- **Pennypit community development trust**

If you have any questions or would like more information contact Lisa Kerr (Early Years Nutritionist) at fundamentalfoodseyn@gmail.com, or 07798846014