

What is weaning?

Weaning is introducing your baby to solid foods alongside their usual breast milk or formula milk. This can be carried out by the traditional weaning method, baby led, or a combination of both.

Baby led is where you offer pieces of food to the baby for them to grasp and feed themselves

When can I start weaning?

The recommended age for weaning is 6 months. Up until 6 months breast milk or formula milk provides your baby with all the nutrients and energy they need.

When starting weaning most of the nutrition will still come from the milk so the amount of food they eat is less important than getting them used to the idea of eating

Signs your baby is ready:

There are three main signs which when they appear together at around 6 months your baby is ready:

- Stay in a sitting position and hold their head up
- Coordinate their eyes, hands and mouth so they can look at their food, pick it up and put it in their mouth
- Swallow food (rather than spit it back out)

Why should I wait until 6 months?

- Baby's kidneys and digestive systems have developed enough to cope with food
- They will be better at moving food around their mouth, chewing and swallowing so may be able to start on mashed foods and finger foods rather than puree
- Your baby will be more able to feed themselves
- You don't need to sterilise plates, cutlery etc
- You can introduce all the food groups - introducing allergens before 6 months can increase the risk of allergies

Equipment you will need:

- High Chair - your baby needs to be sitting upright to help with swallowing
- Bibs - it will be messy!
- Soft baby spoons - these will be softer on babies gums
- Small plastic bowl
- Free flowing cup for water - these help your baby learn to sip rather than suck, which is important for the development of muscles used for speech
- Plastic containers or ice cube trays - great for batch cooking to freeze portions

First Foods:

- Mashed fruit e.g. banana, stewed apple
- Mashed or soft cooked sticks of potato, broccoli, carrots etc
- Toast, breadsticks, rice cakes
- Full fat pasteurised dairy products e.g. cheese, plain yogurt
- Cereal mixed with usual milk (breast or formula) e.g porridge

First foods will taste and feel different from breast or formula milk, so don't worry if your baby spits out their first few spoonfuls!

Preparing food:

- Take out pips, stones and seeds
- Peel skin at first as difficult to chew
- Remove bones from meat and fish
- Wash fruit and veg before preparing
- Chop small round food into pieces e.g. grapes and cherry tomatoes
- With finger food chop big enough for your baby to hold - pieces the size of your finger work well
- Avoid hard food such as whole nuts, raw carrot and apple to reduce choking risk
- You can grate fruit and veg e.g. carrots, apples

Foods to avoid:

- **Salt** - Kidneys can't cope, only need less than 1g per day
- **Sugar** - Can cause tooth decay
- **Honey** - Small chance of food poisoning
- **Raw/undercooked eggs** - eggs should be cooked until white and yolk are solid
- **Whole nuts** - Choking risk
- **Raw shellfish** - Increases food poisoning risk
- **Shark, marlin and swordfish** - mercury levels can impact developing nervous system

Useful Resources:

First Steps Nutrition Trust

Wean the weans

Fun First Foods

Pennypit Community Development Trust

Top tips to remember:

- Introduce allergens one at a time from 6 months (e.g. milk, eggs, gluten)
- Remember to go at your babies pace and let them show when they are hungry or full
- Be patient and keep offering a variety of foods, even the ones they do not seem to like. It may take 10 tries or more for your baby to get used to new foods, flavours and textures.
- Allow plenty of time for meal times - don't stress
- Keep distractions to a minimum during mealtimes - food is a good social aspect, avoid sitting in front of the television, phone, tablet etc
- Show them how you eat. Babies copy their parents and other children. Sit down together for family mealtimes as much as possible.
- Remember all babies are different and develop at different rates - some may progress to different textures quicker than others
- You can use cows milk when cooking. From 1 year your child can have it as a drink in their diet

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