



Weaning

What is weaning?

Breast milk provides all the nourishment a baby needs for the first six months of life. Infant formula is a suitable alternative to breast milk and will also cater for your baby's nutritional needs up to 6 months.

However once a baby reaches 6 months, it is important to introduce solid food into your baby's diet both for your baby's nutrition and for their development.

This gradual process of introducing solid foods into your baby's diet is known as 'weaning'. The Department of Health recommends that you start weaning when your baby is six months old if breast-fed and 4-6 months old if formula-fed.

How do I start?

Pick a time of day where your baby is relaxed and alert. Give your baby a little breast milk or formula first if they are very hungry but not too much as they may then not want to try the solid food.

Make up your solid foods to a consistency that is smooth and runny and start with one teaspoon at one time of the day although your baby may take more than one teaspoon. Then give your baby the rest of their breast or formula feed.

Once your baby is established on solids you can space out their milk feeds and solid meals throughout the day.

Useful equipment:

- Plastic baby spoon and bowl
- Sterilizer for bowls, spoons etc
- Ice-cube tray to freeze pre-prepared meals in handy portion sizes
- Liquidizer or blender

What foods should I start with?

Vegetable purees (for example carrot, turnip, broccoli, peas etc.), fruit purees and baby rice are all suitable first weaning foods. Make sure they are smooth with no lumps. Give your baby one new food at a time, a few days apart.

Never add solids to your baby's bottle.

Tip: Sometimes it can be better to introduce your baby to pureed vegetables before pureed fruits. Sometimes after getting used to the sweet taste of pureed fruit, your baby will not then accept the savoury taste of the vegetables!

How quickly should I progress?

Once your baby is taking about 6 teaspoons at one mealtime, it is probably time to introduce a second mealtime.



What about other drinks?

At mealtimes, you can offer your baby cooled boiled water from a cup. There is no need to offer your baby juices. Even baby juices containing natural sugars can cause tooth decay.

What about commercial foods?

Food prepared at home has a stronger taste than commercially prepared food and can help challenge your baby's taste buds. It is also good to get into the habit of giving your baby similar foods as you are giving the rest of the family, in a pureed or mashed form. However, commercially prepared foods can be very convenient when traveling.

What do I need to avoid?

If you are weaning your child before the age of 6 months you need to avoid giving your child gluten. Gluten is a part of wheat that is in bread, pasta, some cereals, biscuits and many other foods. Rice, potatoes and plain fruit and vegetables do not contain gluten. If you are buying commercially made baby food there is often a 'tick-list' at the side of the jar or box that will say if the food is gluten-free. Do not presume if a baby food is advertised as '4 months' that it will be free from gluten as some of the 4-month old jars and cereals do contain gluten as an ingredient.

Avoid adding salt or sugar to your baby's food. Gravy and stock cubes are also high in salt and should not be added to baby's foods. Nuts are never suitable for infants and toddlers.

Did you know:

Learning to chew and bite helps develop muscles that your child will use for speech when they are older!

What about cow's milk?

Cow's milk should not be given to your child as a drink before the age of one. It can, however, be added to foods to soften them (e.g. mashed potato or baby cereal) from 6 months onwards. However, breast-milk or formula milk can also be added to foods to soften them and contain extra vitamins and minerals.

Your baby needs to continue drinking breast-milk or formula milk while being weaned. If on formula milk, you should aim to give your baby 500-600ml per day

When do I move onto lumpier food?

When your child reaches about 8 or 9 months of age they should be moving onto lumpier food. This means that the food is no longer pureed and smooth but perhaps mashed or minced. Moving onto lumpier food is an important developmental stage that should not be delayed. If your baby is having difficulty moving onto lumpier food you could try adding a teaspoon of mashed food to the usual pureed meal to make it a little thicker. You can then gradually increase the number of teaspoons of mashed food added until it is all mashed.

Gummy babes:

Babies can chew with their gums so there is no need to wait until your baby has teeth before starting lumpier foods



Iron

Babies are born with a store of iron that lasts until they are about 6 months old. After 6 months they need to top up their stores with iron from their diet. Therefore, it is important to give your baby iron-containing foods to prevent them from becoming anaemic. Red meat is one of the best sources of iron and it can be pureed to make it easier for your baby to eat. Other iron-rich foods are eggs, beans, dark green vegetables and cereals with added iron. If you wish your baby to remain vegetarian it would be advisable to see a dietitian to discuss your baby's nutritional needs.

**To find a Dietitian visit our Find a Dietitian Section on our website home page
www.indi.ie**

Nov 2006