

A guide for parents

Complementary feeding



When should complementary feeding begin?

The Department of Health's advice, based on the 2001 World Health Assembly (WHA) resolution, is that breastfeeding is the best nutrition for babies for the first six months of life. However, all babies are different and you may find that your baby is ready for solids before this; but it is important to remember that solids should not be introduced before 4 months (17 weeks) as your baby's digestive system has not matured enough to cope with solid foods. If you are thinking about introducing solids, speak to your healthcare professional first as they will be able to advise you.

Signs that your baby is ready to start:

- Your baby is able to sit up well with support and hold their head steady.
- Putting their toys or their fist into their mouth.
- Watches with interest when other people are eating.

Demanding more milk is not a sign that your baby is ready for solids in itself, nor is your baby waking up more often at night. If your baby seems hungry on their usual milk feeds before six months, more milk at each feed or more frequent milk feeds should be offered before offering them solids.

When starting complementary feeding:

1. Choose a quiet time when your baby is contented.
2. At the beginning of weaning, it often helps to offer baby their usual milk feed first so you are not introducing new foods when they are really hungry.
3. Sit them comfortably in a suitable chair or on your lap.
4. First complementary foods should be smooth and mild in texture and taste.
5. It is important for you to remember there is no hurry - your baby's usual milk is still supplying all the nourishment they need. If they aren't interested, try again in a few days.
6. Sugar and salt should not be added to your baby's food.
7. Foods should not be added to your baby's bottle.
8. Offer additional drinks of cooled boiled water at mealtimes once they are having two meals a day, and between meals if milk is refused.



Suggested first foods

Up until now, the main source of nourishment for your baby has been milk, whether breast or formula, so it is important that the first tastes are mild in flavour with a smooth and runny consistency so they are similar to what they are used to. Mixing those first foods with your baby's usual milk can often make those first tastes more acceptable. It is important to remember if starting solids before six months, gluten should not be introduced until your baby is six months old. Suggested first foods include baby rice mixed with your baby's usual milk or fruit and vegetable purees such as apple, pear, sweet potato, carrot or banana.



Milk feeding during complementary feeding

Throughout complementary feeding, your baby should continue to be breastfed or be given 500-600ml (1 pint) per day of baby's usual milk. Generally your baby should have a milk feed first thing in the morning and at bedtime, and other milk feeds during the day. The timing of these feeds will depend on what stage of complementary feeding your baby has reached. As complementary feeding becomes established, milk feeds should ideally be given after meals so that the milk doesn't fill up your baby, stopping them from wanting any food.

Getting started

In the first week, it is all about getting your baby used to the taste and consistency of food. Start by offering just a tip of a spoonful, then gradually increase the amount you are offering e.g. day 3 and 4 offer 1-2 teaspoons, day 5 and 6 offer 2-4 teaspoons and day 7 offer 2-5 teaspoons. After this first week, gradually increase the quantity of food offered and introduce more new tastes for your baby to try. See the below table for some guidance on suggested amounts to use in week 2 and beyond.

A guide to complementary feeding

	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Up to 7 months
Breakfast	2 - 5 teaspoons of solids	5 - 10 teaspoons of solids	5 - 10 teaspoons of solids	10 - 15 teaspoons of solids
Lunch	2 - 5 teaspoons of solids	5 - 10 teaspoons of solids	5 - 10 teaspoons of solids	10 - 15 teaspoons of solids
Dinner			5 - 10 teaspoons of solids	10 - 15 teaspoons of solids

If you prefer, you can choose other feed times to offer solids. Please remember, this is only a guide and you should be guided by your baby's appetite.

If your baby isn't keen on any of the new tastes you offer them - simply offer them at another time. It can sometimes take up to 10-15 attempts for your baby to accept a new food, so keep persevering.

A simple guide to suitable complementary feeding foods

Unsuitable foods	Under 6 months	6 - 12 months
Foods that contain gluten	✗	✓
Eggs*	✗	✓
Fish	✗	Avoid shark, swordfish & marlin
Shellfish	✗	Avoid raw shellfish
Nuts and seeds	✗	Avoid whole and chopped nuts in case of choking
Peanuts/peanut butter**	✗	Avoid whole and chopped nuts in case of choking
Honey	✗	✗
Full fat milk (in foods)***	✓	✓

* Eggs - Should be thoroughly cooked until the white and yolks are solid. Raw or lightly cooked eggs should not be given to babies.

** If there is no history in the family of allergies, you can introduce peanuts and peanut based foods to your baby from six months.

*** Full fat milk - Although full fat cow's milk and goats/sheep's milk should not be given as a main drink under one year of age, it is OK to use a small amount of this when cooking or preparing foods for a baby.