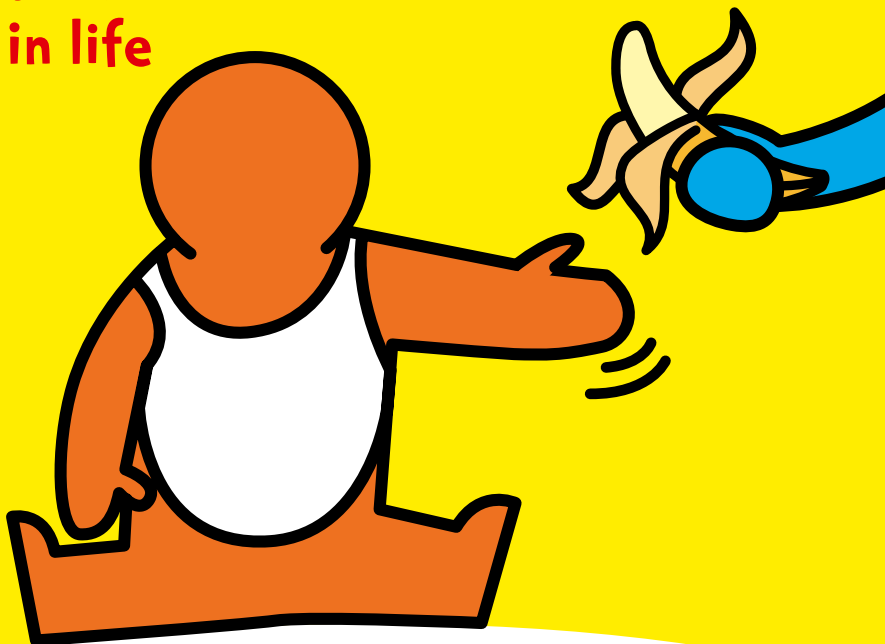


# introducing solid foods

Giving your  
baby a better  
start in life

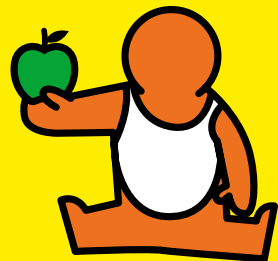
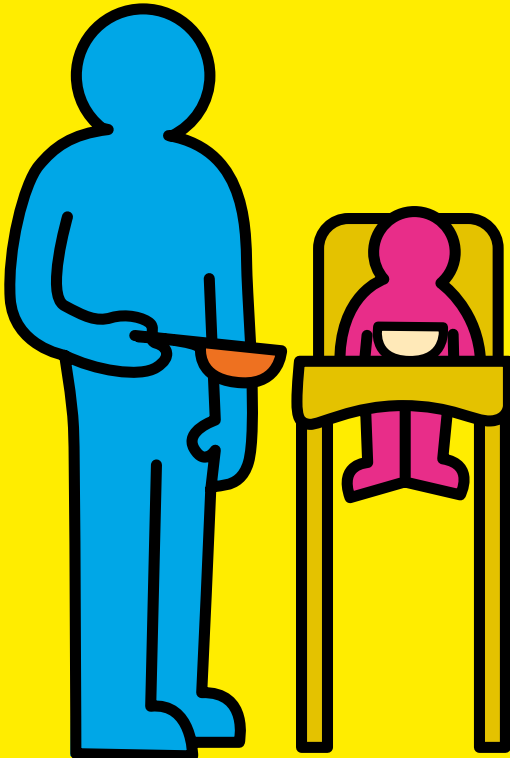


A good start for a healthier life

# starting your baby on solids

Often called 'weaning', introducing solid foods should start when your baby is around 6 months old. Gradually, you'll be able to increase the amount and variety of solid food your baby eats until the main part of their diet is solid food and they can eventually eat the same food as the rest of your family, in smaller portions.

It's a really important step in your baby's development and it can be great fun to explore new flavours and textures together. This booklet is here to help guide you through this exciting time, so you can be sure you're giving your baby a healthy start in life.



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# starting at around 6 months

The latest research by the World Health Organisation shows that babies' digestive systems are not developed enough to cope with solid food before they are around 6 months old\*.

## Why it pays to wait until they're ready

Feeding your baby solid food before this time could lead to diarrhoea and vomiting which may need hospital treatment.

Waiting till your baby is ready will save you a lot of time too, as they will very quickly be able to feed themselves (and with less mess, as they'll be able to swallow properly).

If you are breastfeeding, feeding only mum's milk up to 6 months will give them extra protection against infection, and it will continue to protect them for as long as you carry on.



\*Some baby foods may say 'from 4 months' on the jar, but this is based on out-of-date research.

# 3 signs your baby is ready

Every baby is an individual, but there are 3 clear signs which, together, show it's time to start solids alongside mum's milk or infant formula.



## Your baby is ready if they can:

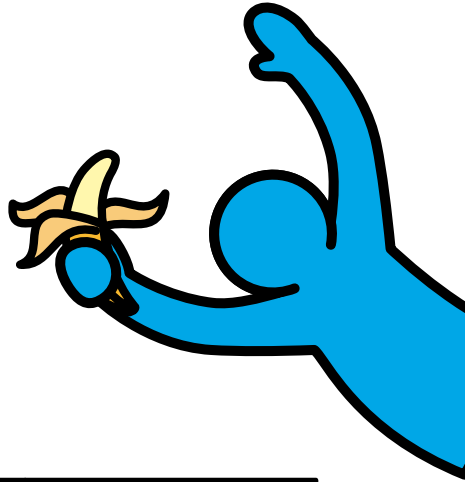
- 1** Stay in a sitting position and hold their head steady
- 2** Co-ordinate their eyes, hand and mouth and look at food, grab it and put it in their mouth all by themselves
- 3** Swallow food. Babies who are not ready will push their food back out, so they get more round their face than they do in their mouths!

It's rare for these signs to appear together before 6 months. But one way to be sure your baby is ready for solids is to try the Banana Challenge (see page 6).

Remember, you should always stay with your baby while they are eating in case they choke. If your child does choke and is struggling to breathe, shout for help, pick up your child and support him in a head-down position on your lap. Give 5 sharp blows between the shoulder blades with the heel of one hand to help dislodge the object. See page 134 of 'Birth to Five' for more detail or visit [www.nhs.uk/Planners/birthtofive/Pages/Howtohelpchoking.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Planners/birthtofive/Pages/Howtohelpchoking.aspx)



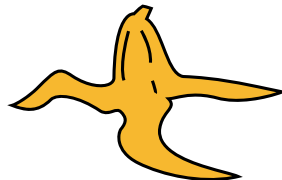
# the banana challenge



If your baby is able to sit up with their head steady, reach out, grab a finger-sized piece of peeled, ripe banana and eat some of it all by themselves, they are ready!

<p><b>How do you know your baby is ready for solid foods?</b></p> <p>If solid foods are introduced too early, their digestive system won't be developed properly, which could make them ill.</p>	 <p><b>the banana challenge</b></p> <p><b>3 signs that your baby is ready:</b></p>	<p><b>1</b></p>  <p>Your baby must be able to stay in a sitting position and hold their head steady...</p>
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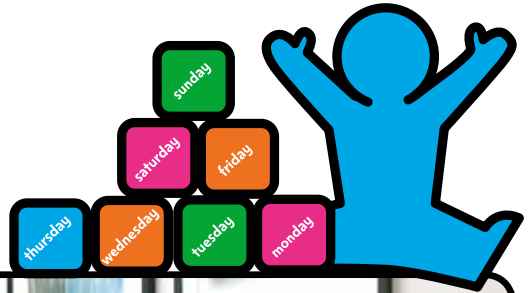
<p><b>2</b></p>  <p>...reach out and grab a finger sized piece of peeled ripe banana...</p>	<p><b>3</b></p>  <p>...and eat some of it with no help from you.</p>	 <p>If they can do all this, and are around 6 months old – they are ready for solid foods!</p>
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# some signs mistaken for a baby being ready

- Chewing fists
- Waking in the night when they have previously slept through
- Wanting extra milk feeds

These are normal baby behaviours and may mean they need a little extra milk until they are ready for food.



## True or false?

**Babies who are big for their age need solids earlier than other babies.**

False. It's easy to see why people might think that. But remember, it's what's going on inside that counts. Babies are ready for solids when their digestive systems are developed enough to cope – and this is at around 6 months. But every baby is an individual so if you think yours is ready, speak to your health visitor and try the Banana Challenge first.

# first foods first!

Here's a handy guide to what foods you should give:

## From 0 – 6 months

Mum's milk or infant formula ('follow on' formula milk is not suitable for babies below 6 months).

## From around 6 months

**First foods:** mashed or soft cooked sticks of fruit and veg like parsnip, potato, gam, sweet potato, carrot, or avocado, cooked apple, peach, melon or pear. Grabbable bits of banana. Baby rice mixed with milk. Keep feeding mum's milk or infant formula as well, but don't give cows' milk as a drink.

**Next foods:** healthy foods like soft cooked meat such as chicken, mashed fish (check very carefully for any bones), pasta, noodles, toast, pieces of chapati, lentils, mashed rice and mashed hard boiled eggs. Also full fat milk products such as yogurt, fromage frais or custard (choose products with no sugar or less sugar).

At around 8-9 months your baby will be getting used to a wider range of food, 3 times a day, plus finger foods like cooked veg, pasta or peeled, cooked fruit (all cooled before eating).

Gradually, in this time, your baby will move from eating once a day to eating 3 times a day. It will be a mixture of finger foods, mashed and chopped foods.

## Cups

Introduce a cup from around 6 months and offer sips of water from a cup with meals. Using an open cup or a free-flow cup without a valve will help your baby learn to sip and is better for your baby's teeth.

## From 12 months

3 meals a day, chopped up if required, plus 2 healthy snacks and milk. Your baby can drink full fat cows' milk and have full fat dairy products – children under 2 need the extra fat and vitamins in full fat varieties. From 2 years old, if they are eating a wide range of healthy food and growing well, they can have semi-skimmed milk. And from 5 years old, skimmed and 1% milks are ok. Try healthy snacks like fruit, vegetable sticks, toast and rice cakes too.



# getting started

- Always stay with your baby when they're eating in case they choke.
- Let your baby enjoy touching and holding the food.
- Allow your baby to feed themselves, using his fingers, as soon as he shows an interest.
- Don't force your baby – wait until the next time if they are not interested this time.
- If you're using a spoon, wait for your baby to open their mouth before you offer the food. Your baby may like to hold a spoon too. Start by offering just a few teaspoons of food, once a day.
- If the food is hot, allow it to cool and test it before giving it to your baby.
- Don't add salt, sugar or stock cubes to your baby's food or cooking water.



## Try this

Start by offering cooked vegetables, soft pieces of fruit or a small amount of mashed vegetables, fruit, or cereal mixed with milk after a milk feed (or in the middle of one, if this works better).

## True or false?

It's best to stick to the foods your baby likes.

False. It's true that babies like familiar foods, so they may not like something the first time you offer it. But food habits are formed early, so if you keep offering a range of healthy foods, there's more chance they'll eat more healthily when they're older.



# top tips to encourage and explore

Starting on solid foods is a real milestone for you and your baby. It's their first chance to explore the wonderful variety of food textures and tastes that the world has to offer. Have a look at our top tips for more ideas.

## Healthy eaters start here!

Babies like the food they get used to. If you give them very salty, fatty or sweet foods and drinks when they are small they're likely to want them when they're older. Give them as many different, healthy foods as you can and they're more likely to keep eating them as they grow. It's a great habit to get in to and one that will hopefully make your life a little easier as they get older.

## Take time

Allow plenty of time for eating, especially at first. Rushing or forcing your baby could lead to problems. Most babies know when they've had enough to eat, so try to go at your baby's pace and stop when your baby shows you they have had enough.

## Demonstrate

Babies copy their parents so you can help them by showing them that you eat lots of different healthy foods.

## Finger foods

Let your baby feed themselves with their fingers. This way they can show you how much they want to eat, and it gets them familiar with different types of food. It also makes eating more enjoyable.



## It's a family affair

Include your baby in family mealtimes and give them food when the rest of the family is eating. Having mealtimes around the same time every day makes it easier to eat healthily. Your baby will know what to expect and is more likely to enjoy the occasion.

## 3rd time lucky. Or fifteenth...

Babies sometimes take their time getting used to different foods so offering a small amount lots of times lets them gradually get used to them.

## How much?

Don't worry if your baby hasn't eaten much in a meal or a day, what they eat over a week is more important.

## Homemade is best

The best baby food is homemade from simple ingredients with no added sugar or salt. Any leftovers can be kept in the fridge or frozen. Then all you have to do is reheat the amount you need. Quick and easy – and it's a lot cheaper than jars!

## Tiny tums

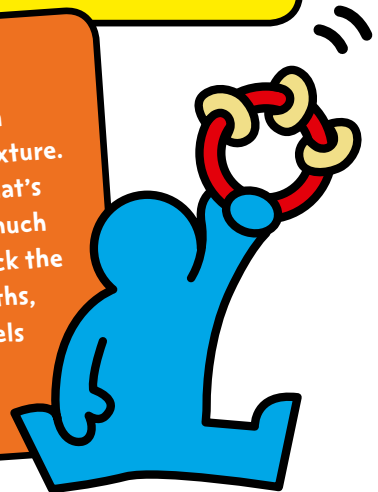
Most babies know when they are full up, so don't make them finish a portion when they don't want to. Smaller, more frequent meals and healthy snacks will suit them better.

## Sit up straight

Make sure your baby is sitting still and sitting up straight so that they are able to explore foods better and will be less likely to choke.

## Jars or packets just sometimes

Baby food in jars or packets can be handy but portion sizes are often too big and much of it has the same texture. This might stop your baby from liking other foods. That's why baby food is best left for when you don't have much time or you're out with your baby. Remember to check the label – even if it says it's suitable for use from 4 months, this is based on old guidelines and research. The labels will be updated in future to reflect the new recommendation of 6 months.



# things to watch

If you choose to introduce solid foods before 6 months and have checked this with your health visitor or doctor, avoid giving your baby foods that contain wheat, nuts, peanuts, peanut products, seeds, liver, eggs, fish, shellfish, cows' milk and soft or unpasteurised cheese.

## Watch out for the following when starting to feed your baby

**Sweet drinks** like squash, fizzy drinks, milkshakes and some fruit juices can have lots of added sugar so avoid these if you can and protect your baby's teeth.

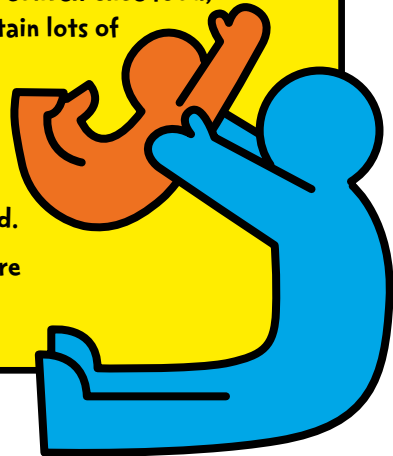
**Cows' milk as a drink** shouldn't be given before 1 year. Offer sips of water from a cup with meals.

**Sweet foods** like chocolate, sweets, Indian sweets (mishit or mithai), chin chin, rusks, biscuits, cakes and pastries have lots of added sugar and fat.

**Salt and salty foods** like chips, crisps, fried food, convenience food, fast food, takeaways, stock cubes and gravy can contain lots of salt, which is bad for babies.

**Choking** can happen with hard foods, bones, small round foods like grapes and cherry tomatoes, and food with skin, like sausages. Avoid whole nuts – these shouldn't be given until your child is 5 years old.

**Honey** can make babies ill, so avoid it before they are 1 year old.



# snack time

To give your baby the healthiest start, swap chocolate, ice cream and crisps for these delicious, healthy snacks:

- canned fruit
- fresh fruit
- yogurt (unsweetened)
- rice pudding
- porridge
- toast, pitta or chapati fingers
- unsalted rice cakes
- bagels
- small cubes of cheese



## True or false?

You shouldn't give your baby extra solids to stop them crying.

True. Babies learn very quickly to use solid food as a comforter, which could lead to weight problems later in life. A cuddle or mum's milk is best.

## Get into the habit

It's much easier to get your baby on the right track now, rather than try and change what they eat later. Always give water with food, rather than sugary drinks. And tempting though it is, avoid using food as a reward. Instead offer to take your children to the park, play a game or read a book.



# allergies

While variety in your baby's diet is really important, there is a chance they may be allergic to certain foods. That's why it's important to introduce cows' milk, eggs, wheat, nuts, peanuts, peanut products, seeds, fish, and shellfish one at a time and not before 6 months. Give them to your baby in small amounts and watch carefully for any signs or symptoms of an allergic reaction (see our 'things to look out for' box below).

If you have a family history of food allergies, eczema, asthma or hay-fever, you may need to be particularly careful when introducing peanuts and peanut products, so talk to your GP, health visitor or medical allergy specialist first.



## Things to look out for:

- breathing difficulties
- skin reaction: blotchy, raised red rashes, itchy patches and swelling around the mouth or possibly the eyes
- runny nose
- stomach upset

If your child shows any of these symptoms, talk to your GP for advice or contact NHS Direct:

[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)  
0845 4647

If you think your baby is suffering a severe allergic reaction, always call **999**.

\*Cows' milk should not be given before 12 months as a drink but can be used as an ingredient in a cooked product or mixed with food from 6 months.

# they're sweet enough already!

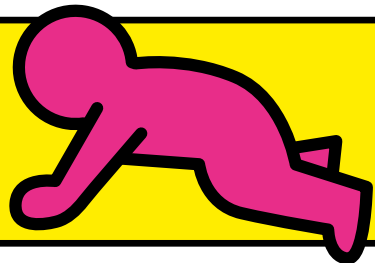
Babies who are given sweet things to eat or drink are more likely to get a taste for them than those who are not. In fact, adding sugar to their diet can lead to these serious problems:

- It can rot their tiny teeth, leading to fillings and even lost teeth (drinks with added sugar are particularly bad for babies' teeth).
- It can put them at a higher risk of becoming overweight or obese, which can lead to type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers later in life.
- It can make your baby more likely to pester you for sugary things, and more difficult for you to say no. They quickly learn that crying and pestering will get them what they want.



## And don't forget...

Babies love to kick their legs, crawl and toddle about as much as possible. This is essential for their development.



# safety and hygiene



Ensure your baby is not at risk from germs as a result of food preparation and serving.

- Always wash your hands well before preparing your baby's food.
- Check that your baby's hands are clean before feeding.
- Keep surfaces clean and prevent pets from coming near food or surfaces where food is prepared.
- Keep chopping boards thoroughly clean.
- Keep cooked and raw meats covered and away from each other and from other foods in the fridge.
- Thoroughly wash all bowls and spoons for feeding in hot soapy water.



- Don't save and re-use foods that your baby has half eaten. It may result in diarrhoea and vomiting.
- Cooked food should not be reheated more than once.
- Cook all food thoroughly and cool it to a lukewarm temperature before giving it to your baby.
- Wash and peel fruit and vegetables, such as apples and carrots.
- Avoid raw eggs and raw shellfish.

## Storing and reheating food

- Cool food as quickly as possible (ideally within one to two hours) and place it in the fridge or freezer. Food placed in the fridge should be eaten within two days.
- Make sure that frozen food is thoroughly defrosted before reheating. The safest way to do this is in the fridge overnight or using the defrost setting on a microwave.
- Reheat food thoroughly so it is piping hot all the way through. Allow it to cool before offering it to your baby.
- To cool food quickly, place the food in an airtight container and hold it under a cold running tap, stirring the contents from time to time to allow cooling throughout.



# vitamins

If you are breastfeeding your baby, you should take a daily supplement of 10mcg of vitamin D.

If your baby is 6 months or older, and/or is drinking less than 500ml (1 pint) of infant formula per day, give them vitamin drops containing vitamins A, C and D. Continue to give your child vitamin drops until they are 5.

Be careful not to give your baby two supplements at the same time. For example, don't give them cod liver oil as well as vitamin drops – one on its own is strong enough.

Your health visitor can give you advice on vitamins. You will be able to get vitamin drops free if you qualify for Healthy Start.

## HEALTHY START

If you have children under four or are pregnant and on benefits, or if you're pregnant and under 18, you could qualify

for Healthy Start. With Healthy Start, you can get free vouchers every week which you can spend on milk, fresh fruit, fresh vegetables and infant formula milk. You can also get free vitamins. Ask your health visitor or midwife for details or visit [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk)

Even if you don't qualify for Healthy Start you might still be able to buy Healthy Start children's vitamin drops or Healthy Start vitamins for women. Ask your health visitor or midwife for details.



# what is start4life?

Start4Life is an initiative to help you give your baby a healthier start in life. There are 6 Start4Life building blocks, based on the latest infant health research:

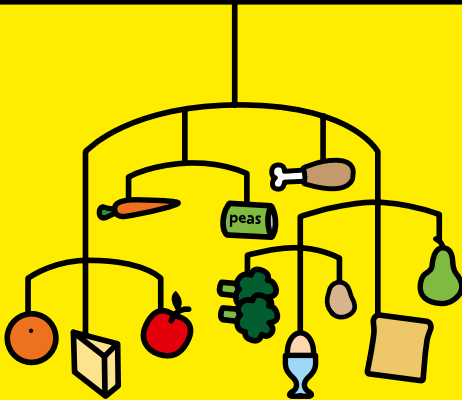
1. mum's milk – why mums are the baby milk experts
2. every day counts – how each day of mum's milk makes a difference to your baby's health
3. no rush to mush – 3 signs that your baby is ready to start on solid foods
4. taste for life – how giving your baby a variety of food now may stop them turning into a fussy eater later
5. sweet as they are – how to avoid giving your baby a sweet tooth
6. baby moves – why it's important for all little ones to be lively and active



# We're here to help you

If you need to talk to someone about anything in this booklet, or anything to do with your baby's health, please ask. You can:

- Talk to your midwife or health visitor
- Visit your local Sure Start Children's Centre
- Call Start4Life on **0300 123 1021\*** or visit [www.nhs.uk/start4life](http://www.nhs.uk/start4life)
- Call the National Breastfeeding Helpline on **0300 100 0212\*** or visit [www.nationalbreastfeedinghelpline.org.uk](http://www.nationalbreastfeedinghelpline.org.uk)



\*Calls to 03 numbers should cost no more than geographic 01 or 02 UK-wide calls and may be part of inclusive minutes subject to your provider and your call package. The National Breastfeeding Helpline is open from 9.30am to 9.30pm. The Start4Life lines are open from 9am to 8pm. Both are open 7 days a week.

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A good start for a healthier life