

Starting solid foods: weaning your baby

Nutrition and Dietetics

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Information for Patients

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Starting your baby on solid food is an important step. This is called weaning. It helps your baby get the food and nutrients they need to grow. This can feel exciting and worrying. This leaflet will give you tips to help your baby start eating solid foods well.

When should my baby begin weaning?

- **For infants born at term:** from around 6 months of age. But not before 4 months.
- **For infants born preterm (before 34 weeks gestation):** At 5 months corrected gestational age (CGA), and not before. This means 5 months after their due date. It may be appropriate to wait until 6 months CGA if your baby is not developmentally ready. If you have concerns about your baby's development, talk with your health care professionals.

Why do I need to wean my child?

- To introduce family foods, enjoy mealtimes and have a good relationship with food.
- It is a time of skill learning. It is important to offer different textures and flavours from the beginning. Try to choose foods that you are already cooking at home that day. Or if you are eating at a different time, you can store them safely in the fridge or freezer for meals the next day.
- At first, your baby will get most of their nutrition from milk. As times goes on, your baby will eat more solid meals. You should lessen the amount of milk your child drinks each day.



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Signs that your baby is ready to start solid foods:

- Can easily stay in a sitting position, with only a little support.
- Can hold their head in a stable position when sitting.
- Can look at food, pick it up, and bring it to their open mouth.
- Can swallow food rather than push it out.



Babies are born with a reflex to push their tongue out which is important for drinking milk. At around 4 to 6 months of age they will learn to swallow food rather than push or spit it out.

Things that might look like your baby is ready but they are not:

- **Drinking more milk:** Your baby might be hungrier because they are going through a growth spurt. In the early stages of weaning, give your baby more milk if they ask for it.
- **Waking up more often in the night:** This can happen when your baby is learning new things. Or is sleeping more in the day.
- **Teeth:** Teeth come at different times. It does mean your baby is ready to eat. Babies do not need teeth to start eating. They can chew soft food with their gums.
- **Being big:** being a bigger baby does not mean we need to give food earlier, and being smaller does not mean we need to wait. Check out the signs that your baby is ready (above).

Why should I wait until my baby is around 6 months?

1. Breast milk or first infant formula gives all the nutrition your baby needs until around 6 months. After this, you need to introduce food so they can get enough energy, protein and other vitamins and minerals such as iron.
2. It gives your baby time to develop so they will be better at moving food around their mouth, chewing and swallowing. This may mean they can have mashed, lumpy and finger foods (and may not need smooth, blended foods at all). Younger babies (4 to 6 months old) are not able to do this and would need blended/pureed food.
3. Your baby will be able to feed themselves more.



What you need to start feeding your baby solid food:

- The best spoon to use for starting your baby on solids is a flat plastic baby spoon.
- A baby bowl or plastic plate. Or a clean tray table attached to the high chair.
- A blender or a fork.
- You want to use a high chair with a tray table. Or for older babies a baby seat that attaches to a dining chair so they can join you at the table.

Try not to use pouches or fillable dummies. These do let your baby taste and eat food, they do not let them experience the food.

Beginning weaning with smooth textures and tastes

Let your baby get used to swallowing food. This is very different from sucking and swallowing milk. Your baby may be confused by spoon feeding because of this. When you start weaning, very little food will actually go in.

- Try to offer food when baby is not too hungry and not too full. You can do this by offering food between milk feeds. Often 1 to 2 hours before or after a milk feed.
- Put a small amount of food into a baby bowl or plate of food. Let your baby explore the food with their hands.
- Use a spoon to gently put the food to their lips to let them taste it. Let them control what happens. They may lick it or put it in their mouth. They may only take 1 to 2 teaspoons at first.
- Start by giving your baby food once a day. Do this for the first few days. Do not do this for longer than 1 to 2 weeks. Your baby should be able to have 3 good meals per day by around 9 months.
- You can start by using savoury foods that you are already cooking in the home. You can blend, mash or give soft chunks if taking a baby led approach.
- You may want to start with purees, or take a baby led weaning approach, or a mix of both. There is no right or wrong on how to wean.
- If you need to thin down the consistency of blended food, you can add a little water, cows milk, expressed breast milk or formula milk.
- If you are going to use store bought purees, be mindful of how much sugar they have.
- Your baby may cough, gag or heave a little. This is a way of bringing it back to spit out or chew up properly. This is part of learning how to eat. Calmly encourage your baby and let them know that it is okay. You can offer some water in an open cup to sip to wash it down.

First foods to give:

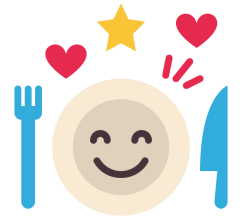
- Try to use the same foods you are preparing for the rest of the family.
- Soft vegetables (carrot, swede, parsnip, sweet potato, courgette, turnip, butternut squash, potato)
- Well-cooked meat, chicken, fish, egg, tofu, or legumes
- Soft fruits (apple, banana, pear, peach, papaya, mango)
- Cereals, porridge or baby rice, yogurt, cheese

Always stay and watch your baby while they eat to make sure they are safe.



Get messy

- Playing with food and getting messy is an important part of learning about different foods. It helps baby to accept them more readily. Let your baby touch their food, play with it and lick their fingers. You can also help them to use a spoon to scoop food and guide it into their mouth.
- Even if your baby's gets messy, do not clean up until after the meal. especially if your baby does not like having their face wiped. Letting them get messy will help baby to have a good relationship with food.



Feeding cues

- Watch your baby to learn their behaviour about when they want to eat and when they want to stop. **Stopping cues can look like:**
 - repeatedly looking away
 - keeping their mouth closed when spoon touches lips
 - pushing the spoon away
 - throwing food

However, some babies will throw food and get distracted easily. Try to reengage them in the meal.

- Help your baby to learn by putting food in their mouth or letting them just pick up foods. This is an important skill for them to learn.
- If they are not interested in a meal, it can be tempting to pressure your baby to eat 'one more mouthful' or 'take one more bite' or push food in when their mouth is open. Try not to worry when they do not eat much. Their appetite will change. They can eat more another day to catch up if they need to.
- Ask older babies to leave food on their plate if they do not want it. Take the plate away if they continue and kindly say something like "I guess we are not feeling hungry today". Take the plate away when the mealtime is over (usually 20 to 30 minutes).
- Try not to give a big pudding or a bottle of milk straight after meals. Do let them know that the meal is going to end in a few minutes. This is so they can eat a bit more if they want to, but then take the plate away without comment.

Have fun learning new foods

- Offering a **rainbow** of different fruits and vegetables can help babies accept new foods. It can take 20 tries or more before your baby will accept a new food or texture. This can take longer as they get older, which is why we offer a wide range of flavours and textures from the start.

- Babies like sweet flavours because their milk is sweet. Start with savoury foods as it will help baby to learn to accept a wide range of flavours.
- It is normal to reject new foods or even meals you often cook. It may be that they are not hungry or do not want it today. Or it may just taste different to last time. Each time you cook a meal, the flavour, texture and appearance will be different. This is a good thing. You could talk to baby about why it is different like “Today I added mushrooms instead of carrots”.
- Baby jars can be handy. However they tend to be expensive and lower in energy and protein than meals you cook at home. Some babies like them because the flavour and texture are always the same. This is not always helpful as we want babies to learn how to eat a varied and balanced diet.

Moving on weaning with mashed food with lumps

- Move onto mashed soft lumpy textures when your baby is able to swallow. Chewing helps develop muscles ready for speech.
- Nutritional intake becomes more important from this age. This is because breast milk or formula alone may no longer be enough to meet to help them grow. Aim for 1 to 2 meals per day along with their milk.
- Keep meals fairly short. Around 20 to 30 minutes long. This is so they do not get bored and they still have time to do other things like play and nap.
- Eating is a social activity and baby will learn by watching and copying you. Try eating together. This is a good way of having fun and teaching them to enjoy mealtimes.
- If you cook with flavourings, herbs and spices then continue to do so. There is usually no need to cook special meals for baby unless you are having a meal which can be salty/spicy like a takeaway or difficult to mash down or chew like pizza.
- Start mixing small, soft lumps into your baby’s blended food. You can:
 - add well-cooked vegetables like peas or lentils
 - mash meals with a fork
 - blend the food for a short time so it’s not too smooth

This will help your baby get used to new textures and learn to chew.

- At first you can try to make lumps the same size and softness so it is easier to eat. Then start to make bigger lumps in a less smooth blend.
- Let your baby play with lumpy foods. This will encourage them to put it to their mouth and then eat it either from a spoon or from their hands. It can also encourage them to touch the food and feed themselves if they can.

- Some babies may find it more difficult to manage mixed textures such as hard lumps mixed in a puree or liquid. This can be cereals with milk or 'stage 2' baby jars/ pouches . You can use a fork to mash the lumps down a little whilst they get used to them.
- Talk to your health care professional if your baby is going to be 9 months of age and is still finding it very hard to manage lumps.

Suitable meals:

- Try to use the same foods you are preparing for the rest of the family.
- Mince, carrots and mashed potato
- Fish in white sauce, peas and rice
- Chicken tagine and couscous
- Egg mayonnaise / beans and jacket potato
- Dal or chickpea curry
- Banana / strawberries and greek yogurt



Finger foods:

- Finger foods are another way of introducing lumps and developing chewing skills. Using fingers to feed themselves helps baby to develop hand-eye co-ordination.
- Start off with foods that breaks up easily in their mouth.
- Finger foods should be big enough for your baby to hold onto and feed to themselves.
- **To reduce the risk of choking, do not feed your baby:**
 - whole nuts
 - whole grapes
 - whole cherry tomatoes
 - hard foods such as raw carrots and apples

Circular foods like grapes and tomatoes can be cut into quarters lengthwise to make them safe to eat. Harder foods can often be cooked, or cut into smaller pieces that can be easily swallowed.

- Babies under a year do not often need snacks. This is because they have lots of opportunities to eat at their 3 meals a day and milk feeds. However, many finger foods can be used for when you are out of the home.
- There are many baby snacks that can be bought. Some of these are easy to eat as they melt in the mouth. These are not needed for good nutritional intake and do not help chewing skills. Try not to use this often. It may affect their acceptance to eat the nutritious meal later.

Examples of soft finger foods include:

- Soft cooked vegetables, such as carrot, broccoli, courgette, cauliflower, parsnip, butternut squash, or sweet potato
- Slices of soft fruit such as peach, melon, avocado and banana (or harder fruits like apple and pear cooked without adding sugar)
- Cooked starchy foods, such as potato, sweet potato, cassava, pasta, noodles, chapatti, rice
- Fingers of toast, pitta bread or chapatti, with butter or similar spread
- Well cooked pasta shapes
- Well cooked pulses, such as beans and lentils
- Well cooked flaked fish without bones
- Hard boiled eggs
- Well cooked shredded meat / poultry without bones, such as chicken, beef, pork and lamb
- Grated / small chunks of pasteurised full-fat cheese (choose lower salt options)



At 9 to 10 months introduce mixed textures and chopped foods

- When your baby can tolerate lump textures, move on to chopped family foods and a bigger selection of finger foods. Your baby's ability to chew is developing and will now take a wide variety of foods, eating similar meals to the rest of the family.
- You may notice that your baby is able to safely chew foods with their gums and move the food around their mouth. They may also have some teeth to help them bite crunchier textures.
- Offer 3 meals a day, try to use family foods whenever possible, including protein at 2 meals a day.
- Have a varied menu, with a range of textures to avoid fussy eating habits later on.
- It is best to not have night feeds as part of the daily routine. Too much milk intake can reduce your baby's appetite for food, and this may increase the risk of nutritional deficiencies like iron deficiency.

Suitable meals:

- Spaghetti bolognese / Chilli con carne/ Lasagne
- Chicken curry and rice
- Roast dinner
- Boiled eggs and toast soldiers/ beans on toast
- Dal and Roti

You can choose to give harder finger foods as part of the meal or as a snack. Wait until molar teeth appear before offering hard food such as raw carrot or apple slices as these could be a choking hazard.

Examples of harder finger foods include:

- Raw fruit and vegetable sticks, hummus and pitta
- Buttered toast triangles or soldiers
- Chicken strips
- Homemade chips
- Pizza



Always stay and watch your baby while they eat to make sure they are safe.

Nutrition for your baby’s growth and development:

Having a varied and balanced diet is important for your baby’s growth and development. At each meal, give some protein, starchy foods and vegetables.

- **Protein** helps with growth. Milk stops giving your baby enough protein by 6 months of age. Try to give protein at meals, 2 times a day. We get protein in our diet from foods like:
 - Meat
 - Fish
 - Eggs
 - Pulses
 - Lentils
 - Beans
 - Nut butters
 - Dairy foods
 - Some vegetarian meat alternatives
- **Starchy** foods, like potatoes, rice, pasta, or bread, all give energy.
- **Iron:** Babies are born with some iron. This may run out by 6 months. Breastmilk or formula milk alone is no longer enough to replace it. Great sources of iron are meat, oily fish, pulses, beans, legumes, eggs, and nut butters.
- **Fibre** is found in most fruit, vegetables and cereals. Having these at every meal will help your baby to poo regularly and have a healthy gut.
- **Fluid** is also important for regular bowel movements. As baby eats more and takes less milk, give a cup of water with each meal to make sure they are staying hydrated.
- From 12 months, it is important that your baby gets at least **3** servings of milk, yoghurt and/or cheese per day. This is to make sure they get enough calcium, B12 and iodine.



Do not add these to your baby's food:

Fat	<p>Try not to give your baby less healthy fats from processed foods like takeaways, fried food, biscuits, cakes and pastries.</p> <p>We recommend using full fat cows milk, yogurt and cheese.</p>
Salt	<p>Do not add salt to their food. This is because too much salt can be harmful for baby's kidneys.</p> <p>Serve your baby first before adding salt/ stock/gravy to your family meals.</p>
Sugar	<p>Sugar can damage the growing teeth. It should be limited. Do not give your baby sweetened drinks, fruit juice, sweets, biscuits and cake.</p>
Honey	<p>Do not give your baby honey if they are less than 1 years old. Honey can sometimes contain harmful spores which could give your baby an infection.</p>
Hot Chilli	<p>Do not use spices like chilli or paprika that are very hot.</p> <p>Use other herbs and spices to flavour the food. You can use sweet or smoked paprika or mild chilli if needed.</p>

Vitamin D supplements:

- Babies need 10 micrograms (10µg) of vitamin D every day from birth until they are 1 years old. This helps their bones grow strong. You can get vitamin drops. You can give this with a spoon or syringe. It is not added to bottles. Vitamin D sprays can also be used on bottle teats or mothers nipple if breastfeeding for very young infants.
- A multivitamin that has Vitamin D such as Healthy Start vitamin drops, Abidec (contains peanut oil), Dalivit and Wellbaby multivitamin drops are suitable for children under 1 year. You can keep giving this until 4 years old. They are available from chemists, supermarkets, or Healthy Start.

Drinks from 6 to 12 months of age:

- At 6 months start to offer your baby a drink of water from an open beaker or cup. It will take a while to learn to do this. Starting with water is helpful to avoid messy spillages. Try to avoid sippy cups which need a lot of pressure to suck the drink. This can affect facial and dental development. It can increase the risk of dental caries.
- Do not add any powders or solids to your baby's bottle (like baby rusks). To develop feeding skills it is important to give solids from a spoon or with fingers.

Milk

- Breastmilk is the optimal milk throughout the first year of life. It has everything a baby needs to grow and develop up to 6 months of age.
- You can keep breast feeding for as long as you want. This is because it has benefits to both baby and mother's health. However, the amount of breast milk will start to reduce from 6 months of age when they start to eat food. It will then lower about half of baby's nutritional needs and in the 2nd year this may be around a third.
- If you choose not to, or are not able to breast feed, formula milk made to EU standards can be used until 1 year of age. After this, cows milk* can be given as a milk drink.
- Cows milk* can be mixed into cereals, sauces and puddings before 1 year.

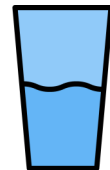
*If your baby cannot drink cow's milk, you can give them fortified drinks with calcium.

How much milk should I give my baby?

Your baby should start to drink less bottles as they start to eat more. In a day, your baby will have a milk feed or a meal every 2 to 3 hours.

These give you an estimate of how much your baby should be drinking. Small babies may drink less:

- **6 to 7 months:** Keep giving milk when the child wants it and stop when they have had enough.
- **7 to 9 months:** 4 to 5 milk feeds per day, or around 600ml
- **10 to 12 months:** 2 to 3 milk feeds a day
- **1 year:** 2 milk feeds a day or up to 500mls in total
- **18 months:** Up to 350ml per day



What else should my baby drink?

- As your baby takes less milk, they should start to drink some water. If they still have lots of wet nappies, it means they're getting enough to drink. Tap water can be given from 6 months with meals to help wash food down if needed. Before 6 months you can use cooled boiled water if needed.
- Water is the only other drink that we should offer baby. Do not give them baby juices, squashes, fruit juices, and other sweetened drinks because they have sugar.
- Do not give them caffeine containing drinks (tea, coffee, soft drinks).

Food	Hand Portion	Guide for 1-2 years	Guide for 3-4 years
Fruit and vegetables 5 a day	 Cupped hand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ¼ apple - ½ clementine - ¼-½ small to medium banana - 4-5 raw veg sticks - 1 tbsp cooked veg 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ½ apple - 1 clementine - ½- 1 small to medium banana - 5-6 raw veg sticks - 2 tbsp cooked veg
Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta, and other starchy foods 3 main meals 1-2 snacks	 Clenched fist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ½ slice of bread/medium chapatti - 1 small potato - 2-3 tbsp of rice/pasta - 3-4 tbsp of cereal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 slice of bread/medium chapatti - 2 small potatoes - 3-4 tbsp of rice/pasta - 4-5 tbsp of cereal
Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins 2-3 a day	 Open palm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1-2 tbsp beans, pulses, dahl - ½ -1 tbsp fish - ½ slice of meat (1 tbsp chopped) - ½ egg 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2-3 tbsp beans, pulses, dahl - 1-1½ tbsp fish - 1 slice of meat (2 tbsp chopped) - 1 egg
Dairy and alternatives 3 a day	 Two thumbs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 cup (100ml) - 1-2 sticks hard cheese (1 tbsp grated) - 1 tbsp of plain unsweetened yoghurt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 cup (150ml) - 2 sticks hard cheese (2 tbsp grated) - 2 tbsp of plain unsweetened yoghurt

Food	Portion	Guide for 1-2 years	Guide for 3-4 years
Oils and spreads		<p>Fats are a good source of energy and fat soluble vitamins and a low fat diet is not recommended for young children.</p> <p>Healthier fats such as olive, rapeseed and sunflower oils, and spreads made from these vegetable oils, can be used.</p>	
Sometimes foods (pastry, cakes, biscuits, sweets, crisps, chocolate)	Occasional and in small amounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 sml piece of cake (to fit into a child's cupped hand) - ½ -1 plain biscuit - Crisps (to fit into a child's cupped hand. Approx 1/3 small packet) - Chocolate (to cover a child's palm. Approx. 1-2 squares) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 sml piece of cake (to fit into a child's cupped hand) - ½ -1 plain biscuit - Crisps (to fit into a child's cupped hand. Approx 1/3 small packet) - Chocolate (to cover a child's palm. Approx. 2-3 squares)
Healthy snacks		<p>Keep portions small to avoid putting your child off their next meal. Try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Starchy foods such as breadsticks, bread, pitta, chapatti, low salt crackers, crumpet and oatcakes - Fruits and vegetables at some snacks - Protein rich foods such as cheese, beans, cold meat, quartered eggs, hummus occasionally 	
Drinks	6-8 cups a day	<p>Aim to include only water and milks as these are kind to teeth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Milk can be offered between meals and counted as part of the dairy foods but be aware that this can put some children, with small appetites, off their meals - Fruit juice is best avoided, even when diluted, as it contains a lot of sugar and is acidic, which can both damage teeth - Avoid all soft drinks (squash, fruit drinks and fizzy drinks), even low sugar varieties, as they can still damage teeth 	

Introducing foods that could trigger an allergy

It is good to give your child lots of different family foods early. Waiting too long (6 to 12 months) to give foods like eggs and nuts might make it more likely for them to get allergies.

Nuts

You should not give whole nuts until 5 years of age because of choking risk. To check if nuts are safe to eat, put a small tiny dot worth of nut spreads (like cashew, almond and peanut butter) on your baby's lips. If there is no problem, you can use these nut spreads and ground nuts in meals often. If you think a food is causing a problem after trying it two or three times, stop giving it and talk to a doctor or healthcare professional. If your child is allergic to a food, always read the labels carefully.

Eggs

Try to buy British Lion eggs. This is because they are very low risk of containing bacteria causing food poisoning (Salmonella). Do not give raw egg if you are not sure if it is a British Lion Egg. If there is no British Lion Egg mark, make sure they are well cooked until the egg white and yolk are hard.



The 14 most common food allergens:

It is important that foods containing allergens are introduced just like any other foods. These foods are:

1. Cows milk
2. Eggs (eggs without a red lion stamp should not be eaten raw or lightly cooked).
3. Cereals containing gluten (wheat, rye, barley and oats)
4. Tree nuts (serve them crushed or ground to avoid choking hazard)
5. Peanuts (serve them crushed or ground to avoid choking hazard like peanut butter)
6. Seeds (serve them crushed or ground to avoid choking hazard)
7. Soya
8. Crustaceans (prawns, crabs, lobster) (do not serve them raw or lightly cooked).
9. Fish
10. Molluscs (mussels, oysters)
11. Lupins
12. Celery
13. Mustard
14. Sulphur dioxide and sulphites

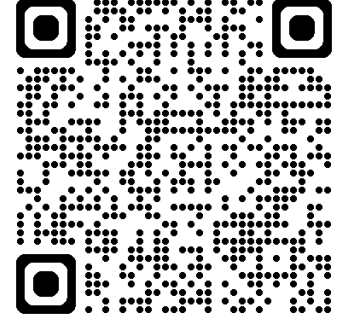




More information can be found:

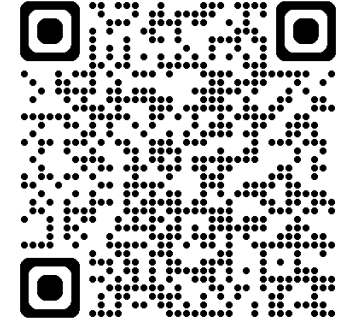
What is weaning?

www.nhs.uk/best-start-in-life/baby/weaning/



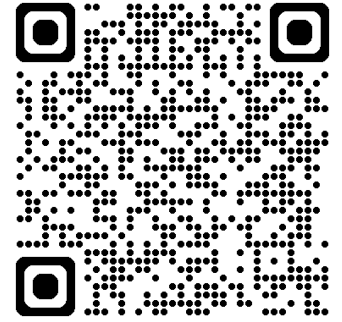
Weaning your premature baby

www.bliss.org.uk/parents/about-your-baby/feeding/weaning-your-premature-baby



Eating well in the first year: First Steps Nutrition Trust

www.firststepsnutrition.org/eating-well-in-the-first-year



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Previous reference:

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	Beginning weaning	Moving on weaning	By 12 months
Texture	<p>Give family foods. Make sure it is blended, mashed or in soft chunks.</p> <p>You can add some expressed breastmilk water, formula milk, or cows milk if you need to thin down the consistency of the blended food.</p>	<p>Give mashed and soft lumpy textures.</p> <p>At first make the lumps the same size and softness so it is easier to eat.</p> <p>Finger foods are a great way of introducing lumps and developing chewing skills.</p>	<p>Give chopped family meals.</p> <p>You can choose to give harder finger foods as part of the meal or as a snack.</p> <p>Wait until molar teeth appear before offering hard food such as raw carrot or apple slices as these could pose a choking hazard.</p> <p>Circular foods like grapes and cherry tomatoes can be cut into quarter lengthwise make them safe to eat.</p>
How much?	<p>Baby may only take 1 to 2 teaspoons at first.</p> <p>Slowly increase the amount of food you offer when your baby is ready to eat more.</p>	<p>Aim is for your baby to have 3 good meals per day by around 9 months.</p> <p>Servings can still be small.</p> <p>Meat, fish, eggs, beans or lentils in at least 1 meal per day.</p> <p>2 to 3 servings of starchy foods and 2 servings of fruits and vegetables per day.</p> <p>Include nut spreads.</p>	<p>Offer 3 meals a day, trying to use family meals whenever possible.</p> <p>2 servings of protein (meat, fish, eggs, beans or lentils) per day.</p> <p>3 to 4 small servings of starchy foods and 3 to 4 small servings of fruits and vegetables.</p> <p>Night feeds should ideally no longer form part of the daily routine. Too much milk intake can reduce your baby's appetite for food.</p>
When to give?	<p>Begin by offering food between milk feeds.</p> <p>Offer once a day to begin with. Slowly give more often.</p>	<p>Before a milk feed.</p>	<p>At family mealtimes.</p>

Vitamin D

A supplement of 10ug Vitamin D per day is recommended for all breastfed infants from birth until 12 months. Formula fed infants should only be given a daily Vitamin D supplement if they are having less than 500ml per day.

Children aged 1 to 4 should be given a daily supplement containing 10 ug of Vitamin D.