

# Parent Guide



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## What is this resource and how do I use it?

Weaning your baby onto solid foods is an exciting time as they begin to explore new tastes and textures. However, with so much information available, it can be easy to become overwhelmed. This helpful guide answers some of the most common questions surrounding baby weaning, focusing on how to support babies from six months old.

## What is the focus of this resource?

Weaning

Establishing a Routine

Health and Wellbeing

## Further Ideas and Suggestions

If you're looking for more information on babies' feeding, health or wellbeing, head over to our **Baby** category where you'll find lots of useful information.

Parents Blog



Parenting Wiki



Parenting Podcast



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# Parent Guide: Weaning at Six Months - Where do I Begin?

## What is weaning?

Weaning is the term used to describe the introduction of solid foods alongside your baby's formula or breast milk. Weaning enables your baby to learn how to move food around their mouths, chew and swallow. The current advice is to begin weaning your baby at around six months old, by which point they may well already be showing an interest in your food!

## How do I know if my baby is ready?

Your baby may show you that they are ready to begin weaning in a variety of ways, such as when:

- They can sit up without support and hold their head steadily.
- They show good coordination between their eyes, hands and mouth. This means they are able to look at food, pick it up and put it in their mouth independently.
- They can swallow food easily, without pushing it back out with their tongue.

Some behaviours are commonly mistaken as signs that your baby is ready to start weaning before they are six months old:

- Chewing fists
- Waking up more throughout the night
- Wanting additional milk feeds

These are typical baby behaviours and not necessarily a sign that your baby is ready to start weaning.



## Where should I start?

Introducing your baby to new foods, tastes and textures is an exciting time but, with so much information available, knowing where to start can be difficult. To begin with, your baby will still be obtaining most of their energy and nutrition from their milk and so the quantity of solid food you introduce isn't as important as simply getting them used to the idea of eating. You might try starting with single fruits or vegetables before gradually progressing to foods such as pasta, rice, potato, meats, fish, beans, yoghurt and cheese.

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## What do I need?

You'll find the following useful:

- A high chair. Ensure your baby is securely strapped in and sat in an upright position to promote safe swallowing.
- Bibs! Silicone bibs are reusable and easier to clean.
- A messy mat or newspaper to reduce the impact of messy eaters!
- Ice cube trays - these can make batch cooking and freezing much easier.
- Bowls and spoons to support independent feeding. Softer weaning spoons are ideal as they are gentler on your baby's gums.
- Cups. An open or free-flow cup will support your baby in learning to sip.



## What is baby-led weaning?

Babies take different amounts of time to get used to lumps, bumps and textures as they explore a wide variety of new food. You may decide to offer your baby finger food, instead of spoon-feeding them pureed foods, or you may decide to combine the two. If you decide to only offer your baby finger food, this is usually referred to as baby-led weaning. This is because you are essentially letting your baby learn how to feed themselves from the start. There is no right or wrong way to wean your baby.

If you do offer finger food, it must be chopped into sticks which are twice the length of your baby's hand. This ensures your baby can hold it using a whole-hand grasp and means that there is no risk of them swallowing it whole.

There is no right or wrong answer when navigating your weaning journey - you know your baby best and the important thing is that they are fed, happy and receiving all of the nutrients they need.

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## What do I need?

To begin with, it's best to start with a very small amount of food once a day. You could start by mixing baby rice with your baby's milk or by introducing single fruits and vegetables which you may decide to blend, mash or softly cook, such as:

- broccoli
- cauliflower
- potatoes
- carrots
- banana
- apple

There are some food groups which may trigger an allergic reaction. It's suggested that you try these foods in very small quantities, one at a time, so you can monitor your baby's reaction. These include:

- cows milk (to be given as an ingredient, rather than as a drink)
- eggs (not to be served raw or lightly cooked)
- nuts, peanuts and seeds (these should be served crushed or ground)
- fish and shellfish (not to be served raw or lightly cooked)
- soya
- foods containing gluten

If your baby responds well to these food groups, it's suggested that you continue to offer them as part of your baby's diet to minimise the risk of an allergy developing.



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## What do I need?

It's important to provide your baby with a varied, balanced diet. To do so, consider including fruit and vegetables, protein, carbohydrates and dairy.

- Vegetables should be cooked to soften and served as finger food or with a texture which is appropriate for your baby. You may decide to include peppers, peas, spinach, parsnip, cabbage or kale, for example. Try to offer a variety of bitter and sweet flavours - this can help prevent your baby from becoming a fussy eater as they grow up.
- Fruit should also be softened or served as finger food. Ensure that the fruit is washed and carefully remove any hard skin, seeds or pips. You may decide to include kiwi, strawberries, apples, bananas, oranges, mango, pineapple, peach or melon.
- Carbohydrates can be cooked, blended, mashed or offered as finger food as necessary. Cereals can be mixed with breast milk, formula or cow's milk as long as your baby is over six months old. You might decide to include potato, sweet potato, rice, pasta, cereal, toast or pitta bread in your baby's diet.
- Protein includes meat, fish, egg, beans and pulses and can be given to your baby from the age of six months. This may include chicken, turkey, beef, lamb, pork, fish, egg, lentils, beans, tofu and chickpeas.
- Pasteurised dairy foods such as full-fat yoghurt and cheese are suitable from six months. Full-fat cow's milk can be used in cooking or mixed with food from when your baby is six months but should not be given as a drink until your baby is one year old.

## How can I ensure my baby is safe as they explore new foods?

It's important to be mindful of bacteria and choking hazards when you begin to introduce your baby to new foods, so make sure you follow food storage and safe weaning guidelines. There are also some foods that you should avoid offering such as:

- Jelly cubes - these are a choking hazard.
- Salty food as it can be damaging to your baby's kidneys. Avoid adding extra salt and avoid foods like bacon, sausages, crackers and crisps.
- Soft or unpasteurised cheese because it can contain harmful bacteria, which can lead to food poisoning.
- Honey. This should be avoided until your baby is at least one year old due to harmful bacteria.
- Whole nuts and peanuts which can get stuck in your baby's throat. These should be served crushed until your baby is five years old.
- Raw shellfish - this can cause food poisoning.

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## Disclaimer:

We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. As far as possible, the contents of this resource are reflective of current professional research. However, please be aware that every child is different and information can quickly become out of date. The information given here is intended for general guidance purposes only and may not apply to your specific situation.

This resource may involve the use of knives, hot water, edible ingredients and kitchen appliances. It is your responsibility to assess risks and ensure the activity is safe for those participating. We will not be held responsible for the health and safety of those participating and cannot accept any liability. It is your responsibility to ensure you are fully aware of the allergies and health conditions of anyone making or consuming these products. Children should be carefully supervised by a responsible adult at all times, especially when using any sharp items such as knives or graters or when near a heat source. Additionally, it is important to remember that certain foods may present a choking risk. It is the responsibility of supervising adults to ensure the safety of children in their care.