

# INTRODUCING YOUR BABY TO SOLID FOOD



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Food is one of life's greatest pleasures. Yet it's also a source of worry for many parents. What should my baby or child be eating? How do I encourage them to eat lots of different foods that will help to keep them healthy? Can I afford to feed them the right things? The next few pages will give you some basic guidelines on how to introduce your baby to solid foods and eating with the rest of the family.

- For the first six months, babies only need breastmilk (or infant formula milk).
- It's normal for babies aged three to five months to start waking up in the night. This doesn't necessarily mean they are hungry. At this age, their digestive system is still developing and they are probably not ready for solid food.
- By about six months, most babies are ready to start on solid food. At this age they may be able to sit up, wanting to chew and putting toys and other objects in their mouths, and reaching and grabbing for things.
- Introducing a good variety of healthy foods from the start will help lay the foundations for healthy growth and development.
- Eating with the family and sharing the same foods will help your baby learn valuable social skills too.

You can learn more about introducing solid foods from the Public Health Agency booklet *Weaning made easy*, visit [www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/weaning-made-easy-moving-milk-family-meals-english-and-translations](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/weaning-made-easy-moving-milk-family-meals-english-and-translations)

**start on  
solid food  
at about  
6 months**



## FEEDING YOUR BABY

### When to start solid foods?

Health experts agree that about six months is the best age for introducing solids. Before this, your baby's digestive system is still developing, and introducing solids too early can increase the risk of infections and allergies. Research has also shown that introducing solid food has virtually no impact on how long a baby sleeps. It is also easier to introduce solids at six months.

If your baby seems hungrier at any time before six months, offer extra breastfeeds. Many mothers find that as their baby grows and gets heavier it can be very useful to make sure the baby's attachment at the breast is as good as it can be – this enables the baby to build up your supply again really quickly so that it is meeting their needs.

Trying an extra feed for a formula-fed baby can also meet their needs.

#### Helpful tips

### Introducing solids before six months

Around six months is the ideal time to introduce solid foods. If you do decide to introduce your baby to solid foods before six months, there are some foods you should avoid as they may cause allergies or make your baby ill. These include wheat-based foods and other foods containing gluten (for example bread, rusks and some breakfast cereals), eggs, fish, liver, shellfish, nuts, seeds and soft and unpasteurised cheeses. Ask your health visitor for advice. See page 43 for more information on healthy foods for your baby.

Babies who were born prematurely may be ready at different times. Ask your health visitor for advice on what is best for your baby.

### Eating as a family

Have your baby eating with the family as early as possible. Breastfed babies have been enjoying the tastes and flavours of the foods you have been eating through your milk. This seems to help them to accept and eat foods more easily as they get older.



Sitting your baby in a high chair at the table means that you can smile and talk to them while they eat so that they feel included. Give your baby the same food as the rest of the family, mashed or cut up into small pieces. Babies should not eat much salt, so you should not add any to your baby's food. Encourage babies and young children to feed themselves with finger foods, and let them decide when they have had enough.

### Getting started

The idea of introducing solids is to introduce your baby gradually to a wide range of different textures and tastes so they can join in family meals. Introducing a variety of foods will also help make sure your baby's diet is nutritionally balanced.

Babies often like to start by holding foods such as vegetables cut into sticks or fruit.

Babies can help themselves to mashed foods. Some mothers may spoon-feed their baby but they will soon be able to do it themselves.

Some babies take time to learn to eat new foods. Your baby will be finding out

about different tastes and textures and that food doesn't come in a continuous flow. This may take time and you should be prepared for some mess! **Never leave your baby alone when eating in case they choke.**

### Solid foods and milk

You will find that as your baby eats more solid foods, the amount of milk they want will start to reduce. Once your baby is eating solids three times a day, you may find that they take less milk at each feed or even drop a milk feed altogether.



## Helpful tips

These points may help when your baby starts to eat solid foods:

- It needs to be a relaxed time – not when you are in a hurry or the baby is unsettled.
- To eat solid foods your baby has to learn to move food from the front of their tongue to the back so that they can swallow it. Some seem to do this really quickly and others take longer – that is OK, it's more important to go at your baby's pace.
- Your baby should be sitting up straight and facing the food. This will make it easier for them to explore foods and they will be less likely to choke. A high chair may be useful.
- Everything you use for feeding your baby should be really clean (see page 43 for more information about safety and hygiene). It's better to spoon out the amount you think your baby will eat and heat this, rather than heating a large amount that then goes to waste. You can always heat up more if it's needed. Some babies are happy to eat food that has not been heated.
- Never reheat food that has already been heated to prevent food poisoning.
- At first your baby will only need small amounts to try.
- Cover the floor with newspaper or a protective mat and use a bib to catch food spills – introducing solids can be a messy business!
- Feeding your baby is a great opportunity to communicate, so keep talking to them the whole time. This will help them to relax while they are eating. You will usually be



sitting facing them, so they can really concentrate on what you are saying.

Initially, your sentences can be very short ('More?'). As your child gets older, you can start offering more choices and using more complex language ('Do you want milk or water?').

- Babies love to explore and do things for themselves – it is how they learn new skills – so encourage your baby by giving finger foods so that they can do it for themselves. Don't worry if they make a mess.
- **Never** leave your baby alone when eating as they could choke. For further information on choking, see page 134.



## How will I know when my baby has had enough?

Most babies know when they have had enough to eat, so don't try and persuade your baby to take more food than they want. Babies are telling you they have had enough when they:

- turn their head away
- keep their mouth shut
- push the bowl or plate away or on to the floor
- scream or shout
- keep spitting food out, and/or
- hold food in their mouth and refuse to swallow it.

It doesn't really matter how much they eat; the important thing is to get them trying lots of different things. Give your baby plenty of attention, chat and enjoy meals together, and don't pressure them when they refuse food.

go at your  
**baby's**  
pace

## Safety and hygiene

Babies and young children are especially vulnerable to the bacteria that can cause food poisoning. Following a few simple guidelines will help to protect them from germs.

### Dos:

- Always wash your hands well before preparing food.
- Check that your child's hands are clean before feeding.
- Keep surfaces clean and keep any pets away from food or surfaces where food is prepared.
- Keep chopping boards and utensils thoroughly clean.
- Keep cooked and raw meats covered and away from each other and from other foods in the fridge. Always wash your hands after touching raw meat.
- Thoroughly wash all bowls and spoons for feeding in hot soapy water.
- When reheating food, make sure it's piping hot all the way through and then let it cool down before giving it to your child. If you are using a microwave, always stir and check the temperature before feeding it to your child. Don't reheat cooked food more than once to prevent food poisoning.
- 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.
- Teach your children to wash their hands after touching pets and going to the toilet, and before eating.

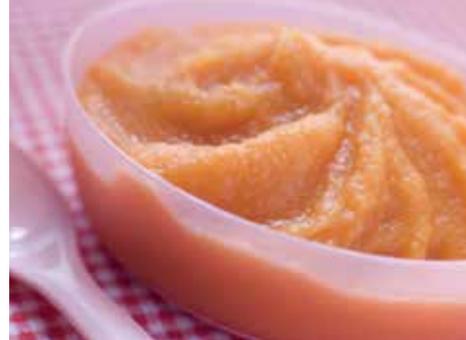
### Don'ts:

- Don't save and reuse foods that your child has half eaten.
- Don't give your child shellfish.
- Don't give children food or drink when they are sitting on the potty.

Due to improved food safety controls in recent years it is unlikely to get food poisoning from raw or lightly cooked hen eggs from reputable suppliers which have been produced under the British Lion Code of Practice. Therefore it is safe to enjoy soft boiled eggs and foods containing raw or lightly cooked eggs. For more information on food safety and hygiene, go to the 'Eat well, be well' website at [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk)

### Storing and reheating food

Cool food as quickly as possible (ideally within one to two hours) and put it in the fridge or freezer. Food placed in the fridge should be eaten within two days. Frozen food should be 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, but remember to let it cool down before offering it to your baby. To cool food quickly, put it in an airtight container and hold it under a cold running tap, stirring the contents from time to time so they cool consistently all the way through.



## Choosing foods for your baby

### First foods

Your baby's first solid foods need to be simple foods that they can easily digest, like vegetables, fruit or rice. Around six months of age, babies can eat finger foods – this means food that is big enough to be held in their hand and stick out the top of their fist. Food cut into pieces that are adult finger sized usually works well. Try:

- sticks of cooked parsnip, potato, yam, sweet potato or carrot (or mash them to begin with)
- banana, avocado, cooked apple, peach, melon or pear
- pieces of raw apple (large enough for your baby to gnaw on)
- rice (mashed, puréed or baby rice to begin with) and rice cakes
- fingers of toast, pitta bread or chapatti
- cooked pasta twists and other shapes.

See how your baby responds to different flavours and textures and get them used to chewing to help the development of their speech muscles. At this stage, how much your baby takes is less important than getting them used to the idea of eating.

# avoid certain foods



## Giving your baby a varied diet

When you are both ready, you can start to increase the amount of solid food your baby is getting. Your baby is the best guide to how much solid food you need to give. Aim to go from offering solid food once a day to providing it at two and then three feeds. Offering different foods at each of the three meals will give



your baby more variety and will help them to get used to different tastes.

The aim is for your baby to get used to eating a wide variety of ordinary foods and to your pattern of eating – say, three meals a day with a drink at each meal and two or three small, healthy snacks. Giving them a wide variety of foods that you and your family usually eat will help reduce the risk of them being fussy about what they eat later on.

## Foods to avoid

**Salt.** Babies should not eat much salt as their kidneys cannot cope with it. This means that you should not add salt to your baby's food or use stock cubes or gravy, as they are often high in salt. Remember this when you are cooking for the family if you are planning to give the same food to your baby, and always check food labels.

**Sugar.** Your baby doesn't need sugar and by avoiding sugary snacks and drinks you will help to prevent tooth decay. Use mashed banana, breastmilk or formula milk to sweeten food if necessary.

**Honey.** Very occasionally honey contains bacteria that can produce toxins in a baby's intestines, leading to a very serious illness (infant botulism), so it's best not to give your child honey until they are one year old. Honey is a sugar, so avoiding it will help prevent tooth decay as well.

# avoid adding salt

## Helpful tips

### Ready-prepared baby foods

It can be useful to have a few jars, tins or packets of baby food in the cupboard, but don't use them all of the time. If you buy baby foods:

- check the 'use by' date
- check that the seals on cans and jars have not been broken
- carefully read the instructions for preparing the food
- choose 'sugar-free' foods, or foods with no added sugars or sweeteners.

Note that although the labels on some baby foods say 'suitable from four months', health experts agree that around six months is the best age to start introducing solid foods.

Remember to check the label of any food product you use to make family meals. Many sauces, soups, breakfast cereals and ready-prepared meals are high in salt and sugars. Try to look out for healthier versions.

## Choking

Babies can choke on hard foods such as raw carrot sticks or large pieces of apple, small round foods like grapes and cherry tomatoes, and foods with skin (like sausages) or bones (like fish). Peel the skin off fruit and vegetables and remove all bones. You could also cut food into small pieces and lightly cook vegetables like carrots before feeding them to your baby. It's also important not to leave your child alone when they are eating.

Babies should not eat when lying back or when on the move.



## Getting into good habits

Feeding your baby a varied and balanced diet will give them the best chance of growing up into a healthy child and adult. It's much easier to establish good eating habits from the start, as it can be hard to change things once your baby is older. Up to 12 months, babies are usually willing to try new foods, so this is a good time to introduce a wide variety of foods with different tastes and textures. Wherever possible, offer them the same food as you are giving the rest of the family.

The easiest way to do this is by giving them a small portion of whatever you are eating. It's cheaper, you will know what has gone into it (especially important if, for example, your family only eats halal meat) and it will help your baby get used to eating like the rest of the family.



Preparing larger quantities than you need and freezing small portions for later can also save time and effort.

Your baby's diet should include foods from each of the following food groups:

- fruit and vegetables, and
- potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy foods
- dairy and alternatives
- sources of iron like red meat (beef, lamb and pork), beans and dark green leafy vegetables like spinach and fortified breakfast cereals

Red meat (beef, lamb and pork) is an excellent source of iron. (For further information, see page 51.)

## Sources of vitamin A

- Oily fish
- Eggs
- Dairy products
- Margarines
- Carrots and dark green vegetables (e.g. spinach, cabbage and broccoli)

## Sources of vitamin C

- Oranges and orange juice
- Kiwi fruit, blackcurrants, mangoes, nectarines and strawberries
- Peppers, cabbage, tomatoes and broccoli

## Sources of vitamin D

- Safe exposure to summer sunshine
- Margarines
- Fortified breakfast cereals
- Oily fish like salmon, sardines, herring, mackerel and fresh tuna

Find out more about vitamin drops or supplements on page 48.

**Nuts.** Whole nuts, including peanuts, should not be given to children under five years in case they choke. As long as there is no history of food or other allergies in your family, you can give your baby peanuts, as long as they are crushed or ground into peanut butter. See pages 14 and 58 for information about peanut allergies.

**Low-fat foods.** Fat is an important source of calories and some vitamins for babies and young children. It's better for babies and young children under two to have full-fat milk, yoghurt and cheese rather than low-fat kinds of milk, yoghurt, fromage frais, cheese or spreads.

### **Shark, swordfish and marlin.**

The levels of mercury in these fish can affect a baby's growing nervous system.

**Raw shellfish.** Raw shellfish can increase the risk of food poisoning so it's best not to give this to babies.

avoid  
risky  
foods



## Food allergies

Babies are more likely to develop allergies where there is a history of atopy (eczema, asthma, hayfever or food allergies) in the family. If this applies to you, it is strongly recommended that you breastfeed exclusively for about the first six months. If you are not breastfeeding, ask your midwife's, health visitor's or GP's advice about what kind of formula to give your baby. Soya-based infant formulas should only be used on the advice of a GP or health visitor/family nurse. Follow-on formula should not be given to babies under six months.

For more information on food allergies (including peanut allergies), see page 58.

## Some meal ideas to try

### Breakfast

- Porridge or unsweetened cereal mixed with whole cows' milk or your baby's usual milk with mashed ripe pear.
- Wholewheat biscuit cereal with milk and stewed fruit.
- Mashed banana and toast fingers.
- Boiled egg and toast fingers with slices of ripe peach.
- Stewed apple, yoghurt and unsweetened breakfast cereal.

### Lunch or tea

- Cauliflower cheese with cooked pasta pieces.
- Mashed pasta with broccoli and cheese.
- Baked beans (reduced salt and sugar) with toast.
- Scrambled egg with toast, chapatti or pitta bread.
- Cottage cheese dip with pitta bread and cucumber and carrot sticks.

- Small pieces of soft ripe peeled pear or peach.
- Stewed fruit and custard.
- Plain fromage frais with stewed apple.

### Dinner

- Cooked sweet potato with mashed chickpeas and cauliflower.
- Shepherd's pie with green vegetables.



- Rice and mashed peas with courgette sticks.
- Mashed cooked lentils with rice.
- Minced chicken and vegetable casserole with mashed potato.
- Mashed canned salmon with couscous and peas.
- Fish poached in milk with potato, broccoli and carrot.

# introduce foods one at a time



### Helpful tips

Although you should not give your baby cows' milk to drink, you can use it in cooking. Milk-based puddings like yoghurt or rice pudding are also good options. If they have eaten a milky pudding, you may find that your baby no longer needs a milk feed after their meal.

You can continue to breastfeed or you can give your baby between 500 and 600ml (about a pint) of infant formula a day until they are at least a year old. Breastfeeding will continue to benefit you and your baby for as long as you choose to carry on. To help prevent tooth decay it's best to avoid sugary or sweetened drinks especially between meals.

### Beakers and cups

It's a good idea to introduce a cup rather than a bottle from about six months onwards. By the time your baby is one they should have stopped using bottles with teats, otherwise they may find it hard to break the habit of comfort sucking on a bottle. Using an open cup or a free-flow cup (ie non spill ones) without a valve will also help your baby learn to sip rather than suck, which is better for their teeth. Comfort sucking on sweetened drinks is the major cause of painful tooth decay in young children. So if you use a bottle or trainer cup, it's best not to put anything in it other than water, breastmilk or formula.

### Choosing a beaker or cup

It's important to choose the right kind of beaker or cup. A free-flow lidded beaker is better than a bottle or beaker with a teat. Drinks flow very slowly through a teat, which means that children spend lot of time with the teat in their mouth. This can delay speech development and damage teeth (especially if they are drinking a sweetened drink). As soon as your child is ready, encourage them to move on from a lidded beaker to drinking from a open cup. Non-spill (valved) cups are not recommended as they encourage longer drinking times. Using lidded free-flow cups instead will help your baby to learn to sip not suck.



### Nine months and over

From about nine months onwards, you can offer your baby:

- three to four servings of starchy food, such as potato, bread, pasta, cereals and rice, each day
- three to four servings of fruit and vegetables each day (the vitamin C in fruit and vegetables will help your baby absorb iron, so it's good to include them at mealtimes), and
- two servings of beans, pulses (such as peas or lentils), fish, eggs or meat each day.

If you have decided not to give your baby meat or fish, they will need two servings a day of

protein-rich foods, like pulses (dhal, split peas or hummus), tofu, textured vegetable protein (TVP) or eggs.

By now, your baby can fit in with the family by eating three mashed or chopped meals a day as well as milk. Your baby may also like healthy snacks such as fruit or toast in between meals.

If your baby is on the move, they may want more food. Babies have small tummies and they need energy and vitamins for growth, so make sure you give them full-fat dairy products such as yoghurt, fromage frais and cheese. Cutting back on fat is sensible for adults, but not for babies.



## Healthy Start Vouchers

If you have children under four or are pregnant and on certain benefits you may qualify for Healthy Start. You qualify for Healthy Start if you're at least 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under four years old and you or your family get:

- Income Support, or
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, or
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, or
- Child Tax Credit

You also qualify if you are under 18 and pregnant, even if you don't get any of the above benefits or tax credits.

Pregnant women and children over one and under four years old can get one £3.10 voucher per week.

Children under one year old can get two £3.10 vouchers (£6.20) per week.

Healthy Start vouchers can be spent on plain (i.e. no added ingredients) cow's milk – whole, semi-skimmed or skimmed; plain fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables (whole or chopped, packaged or loose); and infant formula milk that says it can be used from birth and is based on cow's milk.

## Healthy Start vitamins

Women and children getting Healthy Start food vouchers also get coupons to use to claim free Healthy Start vitamins. If you are entitled to Healthy Start the vitamin coupons will be sent to you automatically. Healthy Start vitamins are specifically designed for pregnant and breastfeeding women and growing children. Your midwife or health visitor will be able to tell you why

vitamins are important.

To claim Healthy Start vitamins, you should post the Healthy Start letter you receive with the vitamin coupon still attached to:

Business Services Organisation  
Healthy Start Vitamin Scheme  
Pinewood Villa  
73 Loughgall Road  
Armagh  
BT61 7PR

The Healthy Start vitamins will be posted directly to your home. This postal arrangement applies to only those living in Northern Ireland.

See Chapter 11 for more information on benefits.

To find out more visit [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk)

## Vitamins

From one to five years all children should be given vitamin A, C and D supplements, it's especially important to give vitamin drops to children who are fussy about what they eat, children living in northern areas of the UK and those of Asian, African and Middle Eastern origin.

Too much of some vitamins is as harmful as not enough. So always talk to your health visitor, pharmacist or GP before starting any supplements.

Your health visitor can give you advice on vitamin drops and tell you where to get them. You will be able to get vitamin drops free if you qualify for Healthy Start (see above).

## Vegetarian and vegan diets

The advice on introducing solid food to babies who are on a vegetarian

or vegan diet is exactly the same as for babies on any other diet. See page 52 for advice on ensuring your vegetarian or vegan toddler or child is getting the nutrients they need for healthy growth and development.

## FEEDING YOUR YOUNG CHILD

By the time your child is starting to stand up and take their first

steps, they should already be involved in the family meal. As they get more active and use more energy, they will need a varied, energy-rich diet for good health and growth. Babies and children under two have small tummies and cannot eat large amounts of food all in one go, so they need small meals with healthy snacks in between.

## Vitamin D

Vitamin D only occurs naturally in a few foods such as oily fish. It is also made by the skin when it is exposed to gentle sunlight between April and September. Encourage your children to play outside, but remember that children burn easily, especially those with fair skin. Children should not be out for too long in the sun in hot weather and never let their skin turn red or burn (see page 113 for advice about safety in the sun).

All adults including pregnant and breastfeeding women should consider taking a 10 microgram vitamin D supplement daily. During summer months, most people will usually get enough vitamin D from sunlight so you may choose not to take a supplement over the summer months (late March/April to the end of September).



Like the rest of the family, your toddler needs to eat a variety of foods from the four groups:

- fruit and vegetables
- potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy foods
- dairy and alternatives
- beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

Babies and children (and adults) do not need foods high in fat and sugar such as cakes, biscuits, chocolate and sweets in their diet. If included, they should be offered infrequently, in small amounts and ideally at the end of a meal, which helps reduce the risk of tooth decay.

## Dairy and alternatives

Young children still need milk. Whole milk and full-fat dairy products are a good source of vitamin A, which helps the body to resist infections and is needed for healthy skin and eyes.

After the age of one, children need less milk than they do as babies.

If you are breastfeeding you can just carry on and your baby will naturally reduce the amount they take as they increase the amount of food they eat. Give smaller drinks of whole cow's milk in cups or beakers, not bottles (see page 47 for more information about choosing the right cup or beaker).

At this age, you can replace formula or follow-on with whole cows' milk or if you are breastfeeding you can just carry on. About three servings per day of milk, either as a drink or in the form of milk-based dishes, cheese, yoghurt or fromage frais, will provide the calcium your child needs to develop strong bones and teeth.

You should use whole milk and full-fat dairy products until your child is two. Children under two need the extra fat and vitamins in full-fat dairy products. Semi-skimmed milk can be introduced from two years of age, provided your child is a good eater and growing well. Skimmed milk doesn't contain enough fat so is not recommended for children under five.



## Some ideas to try

### Milk

- Porridge, hot oat cereal or cornmeal made with whole milk.



- Breakfast cereals with milk.
- Rice pudding, custard or bread-and-butter pudding.

### Cheese

- Macaroni cheese, cheese on toast, cheese on vegetables and bakes.
- Vegetable soup with grated cheese.
- Chunks of cheese and pieces of fruit.
- Cottage cheese dips.

### Yoghurt and fromage frais

- Add raw or cooked fruit (fresh, frozen or canned) to full-fat yoghurt or fromage frais.
- Add yoghurt to curry.



## Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy foods

Starchy foods provide energy, nutrients and some fibre. Whether it's bread or breakfast cereals, potatoes or yams, rice or couscous, pasta or chapattis, most children don't need much encouragement to eat foods from this group. Serve them at all meals and as some snacks. Let your child try lots of different varieties of starchy foods. For more information on fibre, see 'Eating as a family' on page 55.

# starch and vegetables



### Some ideas to try

#### Snacks

- Fruit and vegetable sticks or pieces.
- Breakfast cereals (not sugar-coated).
- Plain popcorn (not sweetened or salted) or breadsticks.
- Toast, bagels, bread buns or potato cakes.
- Fingers of toasted white bread covered with cheese spread.

#### More substantial meals

- Baked potatoes with baked beans and cheese.
- Pasta with vegetable, meat, fish or cheese sauces.

## Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables contain lots of vitamins, minerals and fibre and they liven up meals with a variety of colours, textures and flavours. It's good to try to introduce lots of different types from an early age, whether fresh, frozen, canned or dried.

Try to make sure fruit and vegetables are included in every meal. If possible, give a mix of green vegetables (like broccoli and cabbage) and yellow or orange vegetables (like swede, carrots



and squash) and fruit (like apricots, mangoes and peaches). Orange fruit and vegetables contain beta-carotene, the plant form of vitamin A. Also try to include some citrus fruits (like satsumas or oranges) and some salad (such as peppers and tomatoes) for vitamin C, which may help the absorption of iron from other foods (see opposite for more on how to make sure your child is getting enough iron).

Fruit and vegetables contain lots of different vitamins and minerals, the greater the variety your toddler eats the better, but don't worry if they will only eat one or two.



- Pitta bread filled with cream cheese, ham or fish.
- Couscous mixed with peas and flaked fish or cooked minced meat.
- Noodles or rice mixed with shredded omelette and vegetables.
- Chapattis with dhal.

You can try giving your child wholegrain foods, like wholemeal bread, pasta and brown rice as well. It's best to introduce these gradually, so that by the time children are five they are used to a healthy adult diet.

It's not a good idea to give wholegrain foods only, because they can fill your child up before they have taken in the calories they need. Don't add bran to cereals or use bran-enriched cereals as they can interfere with your child's ability to absorb iron.





Lots of children don't like cooked vegetables but will nibble on raw vegetables – like sticks of carrot or courgette – while you are preparing a meal. Your child might be more likely to eat vegetables if they are given in different ways – for example on the top of a pizza or puréed in a sauce. If your child flatly refuses to eat vegetables, keep trying but offer them plenty of fruit too and try not to make a big fuss if they refuse. It can help if you show them that you like eating vegetables. Give vitamin drops as a safeguard (see page 48 for more about vitamins).

### Smart ways with vegetables

- Top pizza with favourite vegetables or canned pineapple.
- Give carrot sticks, slices of pepper and peeled apple for snacks.
- Mix chopped or mashed vegetables with rice, mashed potatoes, meat sauces or dhal.
- Mix fruit (fresh, canned or stewed) with yoghurt or fromage frais for a tasty dessert.
- Chop prunes or dried apricots into cereal or yoghurt, or add to a stew.



## Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

Young children need protein and iron to grow and develop. Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins and foods made from pulses (like tofu, hummus and soya mince) are excellent sources of protein and iron. Try to give your toddler one or two portions from this group each day.

You can give boys up to four portions of oily fish (such as mackerel, salmon and sardines) a week, but it's best to give girls no more than two portions a week.

Meat and fish also contain zinc, which is important for healing wounds and making many of the body's processes function properly. Zinc can be in short supply in toddlers' diets.

For further information visit [www.nhs.uk/livewell/goodfood/pages/goodfoodhome.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/goodfood/pages/goodfoodhome.aspx)

### Helpful tips

#### Getting enough iron

Iron is essential for your child's health. Lack of iron can lead to anaemia, which can hold back your child's physical and mental development. Children who carry on drinking too much milk are most at risk of anaemia.

Iron comes in two forms. One is found in meat and fish and is easily absorbed by the body. The other is found in plant foods and is not as easy for the body to absorb. Even a small amount of meat or fish is useful because it also helps the body to absorb iron from other food sources. If your child doesn't eat meat or fish, you can make sure they are getting enough iron by giving them plenty of:

- fortified breakfast cereals
- dark green vegetables
- breads
- beans, lentils and dhal, and
- dried fruit, such as apricots, figs and prunes.

It's also a good idea to give foods or drinks that are high in vitamin C at mealtimes, as vitamin C may help your child absorb iron from non-meat sources. Tea and coffee reduce iron absorption, so don't serve these.

## Some ideas to try

### Tasty snacks

- Mashed banana on fingers of toast.
- Pitta pockets filled with canned salmon and salad.
- Scrambled egg on toast with tomato slices.

### More substantial meals

- Beans, lentils and peas made into delicious soups or stews.
- Grilled sausages with baked beans (reduced salt and sugar) and mashed potato.
- Spaghetti bolognese made with lean mince and served with vegetables.
- Chickpea curry with vegetables and chapattis.
- Grilled fish fingers with potatoes and peas.
- Stir-fried chicken and vegetables with rice.
- Ham with baked potato and broccoli.
- Fish curry with vegetables and rice.

## Vegetarian diets

If you are bringing up your child on a diet without meat (vegetarian) or without any food from an animal (vegan), they will need two or three portions of vegetable protein or nuts every day to ensure they are getting enough protein and iron. Don't give whole nuts to children under five, as they could choke. Grind nuts finely or use a smooth nut butter. See pages 14 and 58 for important information about peanut allergy.

The advice on introducing your child to solids (see page 40) is the same for vegetarian babies as for non-vegetarians. However, as your child gets older, there is a risk that their diet may be low in iron and energy and too high in fibre. See 'Getting enough iron' on page 51 and go to page 55 for more information about fibre. You can help to make sure that all your child's nutritional needs are met by giving them smaller and more frequent main meals, with one or two snacks in between.

You will also need to make sure they are getting enough calcium, vitamin B12 and vitamin D. Vitamin drops are especially important up to five years of age.

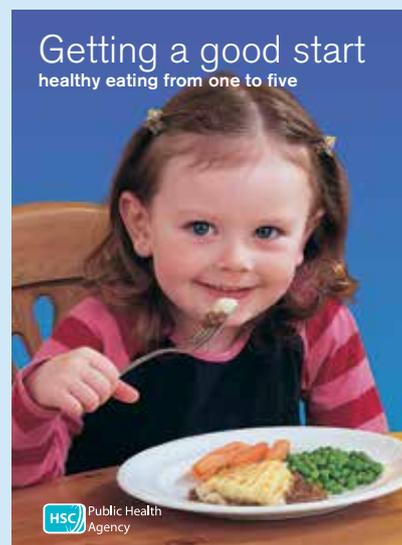


## Vegan diets

If you are breastfeeding and you are on a vegan diet, it's especially important that you take a vitamin D supplement. You may also need extra vitamin B12.

Care should be taken when feeding children on a vegan diet. Young children need a good variety of foods to provide the energy and vitamins they need for growth. A vegan diet can be bulky and high in fibre and this can mean that children get full before they have taken in enough calories. Because of this, children being weaned onto a vegan diet will require supplements of vitamin B12 and riboflavin. It's a good idea to ask a dietician or doctor for advice before starting your child on solids.

# vitamins and calcium



You can find out more from the Public Health Agency booklet *Getting a good start* visit [www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/getting-good-start-healthy-eating-one-five-english-and-translations](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/getting-good-start-healthy-eating-one-five-english-and-translations)

## A healthy vegan diet

**Energy.** Young vegan children need high-calorie foods such as tofu, bananas and smooth nut and seed butters (such as tahini and cashew or peanut butter). See pages 15 and 58 for information about peanut allergy. They still need starchy foods but it's best if these are eaten in moderation. For extra energy, you could add vegetable oils or vegan fat spreads to foods.

**Protein.** Pulses and food made from pulses are a good source of protein. Breastfeeding until your child is two or more, or giving them soya-based formula milk, will also help to ensure they are getting enough protein. Always ask your GP for advice before using soya-based formula. Nut and seed butters also contain protein (but always use smooth versions for babies and children up to five).

**Iron.** See 'Getting enough iron' on page 51.

**Calcium.** Fortified unsweetened soya drinks are rich in calcium, low in saturated fat and cholesterol-free. Some foods are also fortified with calcium, so always check the label.

**Vitamin B12.** Fortified breakfast cereals and some yeast extracts contain vitamin B12. Your child may also need a supplement.

**Vitamin D.** See page 48.

**Omega 3 fatty acids.** Some omega 3 fatty acids are found in certain vegetable oils, such as linseed, flaxseed, walnut and rapeseed. Evidence suggests that these fatty acids may not offer the same protection against coronary heart disease as those found in fish.

For more information on vegetarian diets, contact The Vegetarian Society, Parkdale, Dunham Road, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 4QG, call 0161 925 2000 or go to [www.vegsoc.org](http://www.vegsoc.org)

For more information on vegan diets, contact The Vegan Society, Donald Watson House, 21 Hylton Street, Hockley, Birmingham B18 6HJ, call 0121 523 1730 or go to [www.vegansociety.com](http://www.vegansociety.com)

## Fat, sugar and salt

### Fat

Young children, especially under-tuos, need the concentrated energy provided by fat. There are also some vitamins that are only found in fats. That is why foods such as whole milk, yoghurt, cheese and oily fish are so important. From the age of two, you can gradually introduce lower-fat dairy products and cut down on fat in other foods so that by the time your child is five they are eating a healthy low-fat diet like the one recommended for adults.



There are some foods that will increase the levels of saturated fat in your child's diet. This is 'bad' fat and there can be a lot of it in high-fat fast foods, such as cheap burgers. Crisps, chips, biscuits, cakes and fried foods are also high in fat. Although they tend to be popular with both children and adults, it's best to limit them at all ages to keep your family healthy. It can help to think of these sorts of foods as 'extras' once your child has eaten well from the four other main groups.

# energy foods





Because fat is such a concentrated source of energy, it's easy to eat too much of it and become overweight. Keep an eye on the amount of fat in the food your family eats, and try to keep it to a minimum.

The following tips will help you reduce the amount of fat in your family meals:

- Grill or bake foods instead of frying.
- Skim the fat off meat dishes like mince or curry during cooking.
- Buy leaner cuts of meat and lower-fat meat products, such as sausages and burgers with low-fat labels.
- Take the skin off poultry before cooking – it's the fattiest part.
- Reduce the amount of meat you put in stews and casseroles, and make up the difference with lentils, split peas or beans.
- For children over two, use lower-fat dairy products like semi-skimmed milk, low-fat spreads and reduced-fat cheeses.
- Use as little cooking oil as possible and choose one that is high in omega 3 polyunsaturates such as rapeseed or olive oil. In the UK, pure vegetable oil is often rapeseed oil.

## Sugar

To help keep your child's teeth healthy, as well as brushing their teeth twice a day and visiting the dentist every six months, you should cut down your child's added sugar intake. This is the sugar found in fizzy drinks, juice drinks, sweets, chocolate, cakes and jam. It's best to stick to giving these kinds of foods and drinks to your child only at mealtimes and give them only occasionally.

It's also important to discourage your child from sipping sugary drinks or sucking sweets too often. This is because the more often your child's teeth are exposed to sugar, the more damage it can do.

## Salt

There is no need to add salt (sodium chloride) to your child's food. Most foods already contain enough. Too much salt can give your child a taste for salty foods and contribute to high blood pressure in later life. Your whole family will benefit if you gradually reduce the amount of salt in your cooking. As well as keeping salt off the table, you can also limit the amount of salty foods (such as crisps, savoury snacks and Bombay mix) that your child has.

### Salt: know your limits

Babies up to one year should have no more than 1g of salt a day. For children aged one to three, the maximum amount is 2g of salt a day, and for children aged four to six, the maximum is 3g of salt a day. Find out more about salt, its effects on health, daily limits and how to cut down at [www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/salt-0](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/salt-0)

## Helpful tips

- Try not to give too many sweet-tasting foods and drinks, even if they contain artificial sweeteners rather than sugar. These can still encourage a sweet tooth.
- Try not to give your child sweet foods and drinks every day. You will help to prevent tooth decay if you only give them at mealtimes.
- Try not to use sweets as a reward.
- Fruit and vegetables contain sugar, but in a form that doesn't damage teeth. However, the sugar in dried fruit and fruit juice can cause decay if eaten too often. You should only give your child fruit juice and dried fruit at mealtimes.
- Encourage your children to choose breakfast cereals that are not sugar-coated.
- Always read the labels. Sucrose, glucose, honey, dextrose, maltose syrup and concentrated fruit juice are all forms of sugar.
- Don't add sugar to milk.
- If you flavour milk with milkshake flavourings, only offer it at mealtimes.
- Jaggery can cause the same damage to teeth as sugar. Limit foods containing this, like Indian sweetmeats.



**sugary**  
**drinks**  
**can cause**  
**tooth decay**

# EATING AS A FAMILY

## Creating healthy family meals

Try to eat together and sit at the table. Try to involve your child in preparing food and serving it when it is safe to do so. Allow your child to help with laying and clearing the table. Encourage the child to try all the foods offered. For adults and children over five, a healthy, balanced diet usually means eating foods from all five food groups. The Eatwell Guide [www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/the-eatwell-guide.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/the-eatwell-guide.aspx) shows how much of the various different types of food you need to eat for a well balanced, healthy diet. Children under the age of five need a diet that is higher in fat and lower in fibre than this.



### Fruit and vegetables

Include fresh, frozen and canned fruit and vegetables, salads, dried fruit and fruit juices. Include them at each meal and as snacks. Try to eat at least five servings a day.

### Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy foods

Include bread, potatoes, breakfast cereals, pasta, rice, oats, noodles, maize, millet, yams, cornmeal and sweet potatoes. Make these foods the main part of every meal. Choose wholegrain varieties when you can, but young children should not eat wholegrain foods all the time.

### Milk and dairy products

Include milk, yoghurt and fromage frais. Children need about three servings a day. You can use low-fat varieties for children over five who are eating and growing well.

### Meat, fish and alternatives

Include meat, fish, poultry, eggs, beans, pulses and nuts. Make sure children have one or two servings a day. Choose lean meat, take the skin off poultry and cook using the minimum of fat. Try to eat oily fish at least once a week.

### Oils and spreads

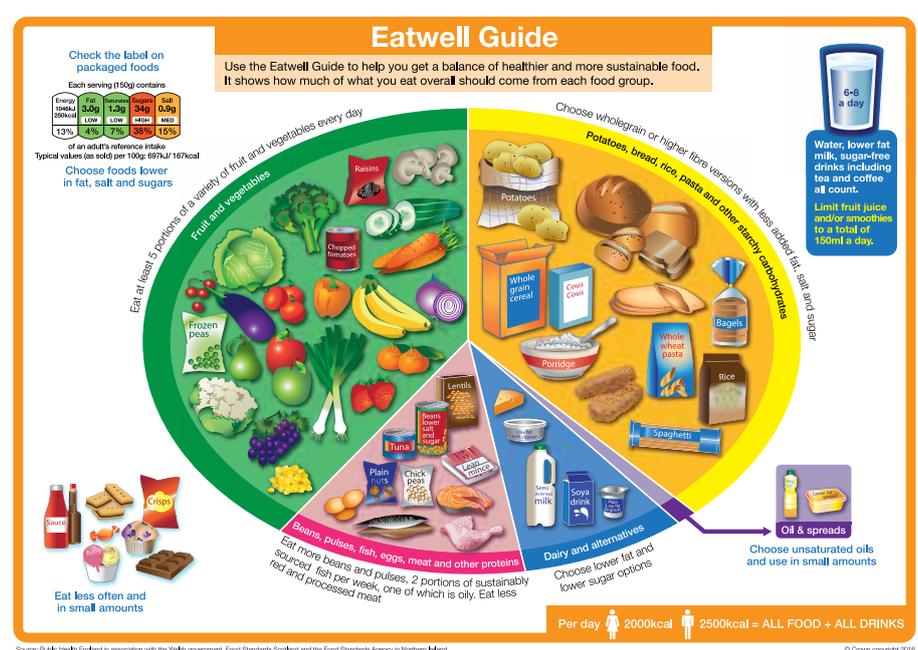
Getting enough healthy fats is essential for growth and development. Young children in particular need enough of them in their diet to help the brain and nervous system develop normally. The best ones to use are unsaturated oils and spreads such as rapeseed, olive or sunflower oil.

You should avoid giving your baby high-fibre versions of foods, especially those with added bran. It stops young children absorbing important minerals such as calcium and iron. It is better not to give young children brown rice, wholemeal pasta or bran-enriched breakfast cereals until they are older, although giving them some brown bread is OK.

# read food labels

## How much food do toddlers need?

Children's appetites vary enormously, so common sense is your best guide when it comes to portion size. Be guided by what your child wants – don't force them to eat if they don't want to, but don't refuse to give them more if they really are hungry. As long as your child eats a range of foods, and your health visitor is happy with their progress, try not to worry too much about the amount they are eating.



Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

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## CUTLERY, CHOPSTICKS OR FINGERS?

Mealtimes can get messy! It will take time for your child to learn how to behave when eating. The best way that they can learn is by copying you and the rest of your family. That is why it's good to try to eat and enjoy your food together. Remember to turn off the TV, phones, computers and laptops and enjoy each other's company. Some families prefer to eat with their fingers, while others use cutlery or chopsticks. Whichever option you go for, be patient.

By about one year of age, babies should be trying to feed themselves. Some are very independent and want no help – so be patient, even if most of the food misses their mouths! Others will accept your help, but will still want to hold a spoon themselves while being fed. Whichever group your child falls into, you can encourage them to feed themselves either with a spoon or by giving them finger foods (see page 41).

### Helpful tips

#### Safety

- Make sure there are no sharp knives on the table within your child's reach.
- Unbreakable plates or bowls are ideal for small children, who often decide their meal is finished when their plate hits the floor.
- When your child no longer needs their high chair, make sure they are sitting at the right height for the table, otherwise they will find it difficult to eat.
- Use cushions, booster seats or even sit them on your own or someone else's lap, but always make sure they are sitting safely.



## DRINKS

Not all drinks are suitable for babies and young children. The following list explains what you should give to your child, and when.

**Breastmilk** is the ideal drink for babies. It should be given exclusively for the first six months and then continue with demand breastfeeding as solid food is introduced. Your child will naturally reduce the amount of breastmilk taken as more food is eaten.

**Infant formula** is the only alternative to breastmilk in the first 12 months of your baby's life. It can be used up to the time

when ordinary cows' milk can be introduced (at one year old) or beyond. Follow-on milks are available for babies over six months, but there is no need to change over to these. See Chapter 1 for more information about these and other types of formula.

**Whole cows' milk** doesn't contain enough iron and other nutrients to meet babies' needs so it should not be given as a drink to babies under one year old. But it's OK to use cows' milk when cooking and preparing food for your baby from six months. Semi-skimmed milk can be introduced once your child is two, provided they are a good eater and have a varied diet. Skimmed milk is not suitable for children under five. For convenience, lower-fat milks can be used in cooking from the age of one.

**Goats' and sheep's milk drinks** are not suitable as drinks for babies under one year old, as they don't contain the iron and other nutrients babies need. Providing they are pasteurised, they can be used once your baby is a year old.

Unsweetened calcium-fortified milk alternatives such as soya drinks and other milk alternatives like almond and oat drinks can be given from the age of one as part of a healthy balanced diet. For more information see [www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/drinks-and-cups-children/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/drinks-and-cups-children/)

While breastfeeding is encouraged into the second year and beyond, for bottle fed babies it is recommended that after one year all drinks should be given from a cup and a feeding bottle should no longer be used. Alternatives like almond and oat drinks can be given from the age of one as part of a healthy balanced diet.

## Rice drink

Young children (aged one to five years) should not be given rice drinks, in order to minimise their exposure to inorganic arsenic. Don't worry if you have given your child rice drinks – there is no immediate risk of harmful effects. But in order to reduce further exposure to inorganic arsenic, you should stop giving your child rice drinks.

**'Good night' milk** drinks are not suitable for babies under six months. After this age, you can start using them, but you don't have to change over as there are no proven health benefits.

**Water** is the best alternative drink to milk, but fully breastfed babies don't need any water until they start eating solid food. For babies under six months old, take water from the mains tap in the kitchen and boil it. Remember to allow the water to cool before giving it to your baby. For babies over six months, water can be drunk straight from the tap without the need to boil it.

Bottled water is not a healthier choice than tap water and usually is not sterile. In fact, some natural mineral waters are not suitable for babies because of the amount of minerals they contain. If you need to use bottled water, remember that any bottled water that is labelled 'natural mineral water' might contain too much sodium for babies.

**Citrus fruit juices**, such as orange juice or grapefruit juice, are a good source of vitamin C, but also contain natural sugars and acids that can cause tooth decay. Babies under six months should not drink fruit juices. Vitamin C may help with iron absorption, so if your baby



## Non-cows' milk formula

Only use soya-based infant formulas on the advice of your GP. Babies who are allergic to cows' milk may also be allergic to soya. Goats' milk, even if it has been specially formulated for babies, should not be given to babies under one year.

is a vegetarian you may be advised to give them diluted fruit juice (one part juice to 10 parts boiled, cooled water) with their meals after six months. To prevent tooth decay, give fruit juice at mealtimes only.

**Squashes, flavoured milk and juice drinks** contain sugar and can cause tooth decay even when diluted. They are not suitable for young babies. For older babies and toddlers, these drinks can lead to poor appetite, limited weight gain and, in toddlers, loose stools. Even those with artificial sweeteners can encourage children to develop a sweet tooth. If you want to use squashes, flavoured milk and juice drinks, keep them for mealtimes, make sure they are

diluted well and always give them in a feeder cup rather than a bottle. These drinks should never be given as a bedtime drink as this can be particularly bad for tooth decay. You should also try to keep drinking times short.

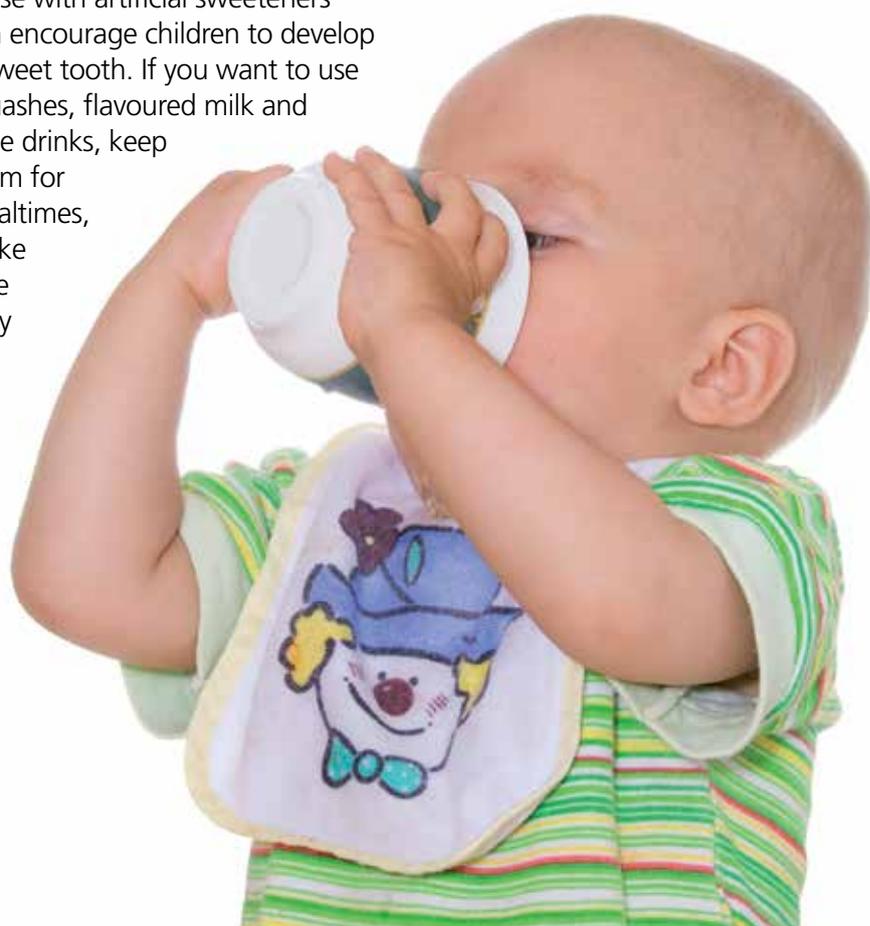
**Fizzy drinks** are acidic and can damage tooth enamel, so they should not be given to babies and toddlers.

**Diet drinks and 'no added sugar' drinks**, whether squashes or fizzy drinks, are not intended for babies, toddlers or young children. This is in line with advice from the British Dental Association.

**Baby and herbal drinks** contain sugars and are not recommended.

**Tea and coffee** are not suitable for babies or young children. They reduce iron absorption when taken with meals and, if sugar is added, may contribute to tooth decay.

See page 47 for information on choosing the right cup or beaker for your baby or toddler.





### Helpful tips

A few people suffer from adverse reactions to some food additives, but reactions to ordinary foods like milk or soya are much more common. A diet high in processed foods is not only more likely to contain additives, it will probably be high in salt, sugar and fat. It's a good idea to replace these foods with fruits, vegetables and starchy foods.

## FOOD ADDITIVES

Food contains additives for a variety of reasons: to prevent food poisoning, to stop it going off and to provide colour, flavour or texture. Some food additives are natural substances, others are synthetic. Any additives put into food must, by law, be shown on the label. An 'E' number means that the additive has been tested and passed as safe for use in European Union (EU) countries. Numbers without an 'E' in front are allowed in the UK, but not in all EU countries.

## FOOD ALLERGIES

Some children experience unpleasant reactions after eating certain foods. Most children grow out of this, but in a very few cases foods can cause a very severe reaction (anaphylaxis) that can

be life-threatening.

The foods most likely to cause a problem for young children are peanuts, nuts, seeds, milk, eggs, wheat, fish, shellfish or food containing these.

### Introducing your child to solids

- If you choose to start giving your baby solid foods before six months (after talking to your health visitor or GP), don't give them any of the foods above until after six months of age. This is because these foods can sometimes trigger development of a food allergy.
- When you give these foods to your baby for the first time, it's a good idea to start with one at a time, so that you can spot any allergic reaction. If you think your child is having an allergic reaction, you should seek urgent medical attention. Common symptoms of an allergic reaction include one or more of the following: coughing; dry, itchy throat and tongue; itchy skin or rash; diarrhoea and/or vomiting; wheezing and shortness of breath; swelling of the lips and throat; runny or blocked nose; sore, red and itchy eyes.
- You may have heard that previous advice was to avoid giving your child peanuts before the age of three years – this advice has now changed, based on the latest research, and you only need to avoid giving peanuts before six months of age.

- If your child already has a known allergy, such as a diagnosed eczema or a diagnosed food allergy, or if there is a history of allergy in your child's immediate family (if parents, brothers or sisters have an allergy such as asthma, eczema, hayfever, or other types of allergy) then your child has a higher risk of developing peanut allergy (see page 14). In these cases you should talk to your GP, health visitor or medical allergy specialist before you give peanuts or peanut-containing foods to your child for the first time.
- Remember not to give whole peanuts or nuts to children under five because of the risk of choking.

If you think your child is having an allergic reaction to a food, you should seek urgent medical attention. Don't be tempted to experiment by cutting out a major food such as milk as this may mean your child is not getting the nutrients they need. Talk to your health visitor or GP, who may refer you to a registered dietitian.

For advice on asthma and allergies, contact Asthma UK's helpline on 0800 121 62 44 or go to [www.asthma.org.uk](http://www.asthma.org.uk), or call the Allergy UK helpline on 01322 619898. Lines are open from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. The Allergy UK website is at [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org)





## PARTY TIME!

Parties are a great time for children to try different types of foods. It's a special occasion, so have some treats as well as some familiar everyday foods. Try the following ideas for healthy but fun party foods:

- Make tiny sandwiches and cut them into different shapes. Use fillings that cut easily, like wafer-thin ham, cheddar cheese spreads and egg mayonnaise.
- Offer bowls of plain popcorn, breadsticks, raw vegetable sticks and baby tomatoes.
- Make reduced-sugar jellies and add canned mandarins or slices of fresh fruit.
  - Offer one or two ready-diluted fruit juices to drink rather than carbonated drinks.
- Fruit scones need very little preparation.
- Decorate small plain biscuits with cheese spread and a small piece of fresh or canned fruit to add colour.
- Serve ice cream with fresh or canned fruit.
- Don't forget the birthday cake for the end of the meal!



## SOME COMMON PROBLEMS WITH EATING



It's perfectly normal for toddlers to refuse to eat or even taste new foods. Children will usually eat enough to keep themselves going, so try not to worry unless your child is not putting on weight as quickly as they should (see page 64) or is obviously ill.

As long as your child eats some food from each of the four food groups – even if it's always the same old favourites – you should not need to worry. Gradually introduce other food choices or go back to the foods your child did not like before and try them again. Remember, as long as your child is active and gaining weight, they are getting enough to eat, even if it doesn't look like it to you.



### Never force a child to eat

The best way for your child to learn to eat and enjoy new foods is to copy you, so try to eat with them as often as you can so that you can set a good example. Children are very quick to pick up on your own feelings about food. Perhaps you are on a diet, or have a weight problem, or are just very keen to eat healthily. Your child may well be picking up on your anxiety and/or using mealtimes as a way to get attention.

These tips can help:

- Give your child the same food as the rest of the family, and eat your meals together if possible.
- Give small portions and praise your child for eating, even if they only manage a little.
- If your child rejects the food, don't force-feed them. Just take the food away without comment. Try to stay calm even if it's very frustrating.
- Don't leave meals until your child is too hungry or tired to eat.
- Your child may be a slow eater so you may have to be patient.
- Don't give too many between-meal snacks. You could limit them to, for example, a milk drink and some fruit slices or a small cracker with a slice of cheese.
- You may find it useful to take the attitude that a food refusal is 'not liked today'. Just offer the food again in a different way, as this may be more acceptable.



- It's best not to use food as a reward, otherwise your child will start to think of, say, sweets as nice and vegetables as nasty. Instead, reward them with a trip to the park or promise to play a game with them.
- If your child fills up with juice or squash between meals and refuses milk or snacks, try gradually reducing the amount of juice or squash they have, diluting it well with water, and give them a small amount of food. Children sometimes get thirsty and hunger mixed up and say they are thirsty when they are actually hungry.

## make meals interesting

- Try to make mealtimes enjoyable and not just about eating. Sit down and have a chat about other things.
- If you know of any other children of the same age who are good eaters, ask them to tea. A good example can work wonders, as long as you don't talk too much about how good the other children are!
- Ask an adult who your child likes to eat with you. Sometimes a child will eat for someone else, like a grandparent, without any fuss.
- Children's tastes change. One day they will hate something, a month later they will love it.

## FAQs

**Q.** How do I get a relative to stop giving sweets to my child?

**A.** Suggest they give a small book, pencil or other non-edible gift instead. If your child does have sweets, try keeping them to a special 'treat' day, once a week. Remember that the number of times that teeth come into contact with sugar is as important as the amount of sugar. So sweets are best eaten in one go rather than over the course of an hour or two. They will do least damage to teeth if you keep them for mealtimes. For more information about caring for your child's teeth ask your health visitor or dentist.

**Q.** What snacks can I give instead of biscuits or crisps?

**A.** You could try:



- raw vegetable sticks such as cucumber and carrots
- a plain yoghurt with a banana sliced into it
- a slice of toast with yeast extract, hummus or a slice of ham
- some crackers, breadsticks or rice cakes with cheese
- a bowl of cereal with milk
- a piece of fruit.

**Q.** I have heard that high-fibre foods are not suitable for young children. Why?

**A.** Foods that contain a lot of fibre (like wholemeal bread and pasta, brown rice and bran-based breakfast cereals) can fill up small tummies, leaving little room for other foods. This means that your child gets full before they

have taken in the calories they need. Bran also prevents important minerals from being absorbed. It's good for your child to try different varieties of starchy foods, but don't use only wholegrain foods before your child is five years old.

**Q.** What can I pack in a lunchbox for my three-year-old when they go to nursery?

**A.** Try to choose two savoury options, some fruit, a sweet option (yoghurt, fromage frais, scone or currant bun) and a drink. Good sandwich fillings are canned tuna or salmon, hummus, hard or cream cheese, ham or peanut butter (see pages 15 and 58 for advice on peanut allergy). You could add a few vegetable sticks (carrots, peppers or cucumber) to munch on and a container of bite-sized fruit – for example a peeled satsuma or washed, chopped up seedless grapes. A box of raisins is fine if eaten at lunchtime. If you include a fromage frais or yoghurt, don't forget a spoon. And a piece of kitchen towel is always useful. If the lunchboxes are not refrigerated at nursery, use an insulated box with an ice pack to keep food safe and cool. If you have a leak-proof beaker, you can give milk, water or well diluted fruit juice.

**Q.** My child will only drink sugary drinks. What can I do?

**A.** Frequent sugary drinks increase the chance of tooth decay. See pages 56–57 for a list of suitable drinks. If your child will only drink sugary drinks, it can take some time to break the habit. Start by diluting them really well with water and offering them in smaller quantities, in a beaker at mealtimes.