



National Day Nurseries Association

★Brighter thinking
for early years

Factsheet

A photograph of a baby with light brown hair and blue eyes, sitting in a white high chair. The baby is wearing a white fuzzy sweater and yellow sleeves. They are holding a large slice of green cucumber in their mouth and eating it. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

A parent's guide to weaning and toilet training

Parent Guidance

A parent's guide to weaning and toilet training

This factsheet has been developed to offer support and guidance on some of the common development stages that your child may go through, including weaning, food refusal and fussy eaters and toilet training. This will help you to understand how to approach each stage with your child and provide you with information and practical tips. It will help you to understand how to work in partnership with your child's nursery (if applicable) and provides links to where you can find further information.

Weaning

Introducing your child to solid foods is often referred to as weaning. It is important that you follow the advice of your health visitor and the NHS guidelines, as these provide the most current up-to-date information. The Department of Health (DH) continues to carry out research and studies around infant feeding and weaning, which can result in the guidelines changing.

The current guidelines recommend that you start the weaning process when your baby is around 6 months old.

The NHS website shares three signs that may mean your child is ready for solids.

They'll be able to:

1. Stay in a sitting position and hold their head steady
2. Co-ordinate their eyes, hands and mouth so they can look at the food, pick it up and put it in their mouth by themselves
3. Swallow food (rather than spit it back out).

The website also shares common signs that can be mistaken for a baby being ready for solid foods:

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

These are normal behaviours and not necessarily a sign of hunger, or a sign of being ready to start solid food. Starting solid foods won't make them any more likely to sleep through the night. Extra feeds are usually enough until they're ready for other food.

Find more out <https://bit.ly/3TWISOI>

If your child attends nursery, they should have a key person who works closely with you and shares information daily about your child's milk/food intake. You should inform the nursery when you start

weaning your child so that you can work together to ensure your child's individual needs are met. Nursery staff may also be able to offer you advice if you are unsure as to when to start as they may have seen the trigger signs themselves when caring for your child.

This may include discussions around times that you would like your child to have solid foods and which types of food you would like them to have. They should provide you with a daily record and talk you through how this has gone at the end of each day. It's important to have continued discussions about your child's likes and dislikes but remember, babies sometimes need to try the same food a number of times before they decide if they like it.

Nurseries should have healthy eating and/or feeding policies that you can request to see. Some nurseries may provide the food for your baby, whereas others may require you to take the food in. You should ask to visit around meal times to see the eating arrangements. It is good practice for babies to be sat at the same level as the practitioner when being fed and to be in small groups.

Meal times should be happy, social times where early social skills such as feeding themselves are encouraged, both at home and in the nursery. Babies and young children may take their time eating, as they are exploring new textures, tastes and smells. You should allow time for this and allow your child to explore the different foods you are offering them. This is how they decide what food and flavours they prefer.

The NHS guidelines provide lots of information about the types of food you should try when starting to feed your baby solids. This is broken down into the different age groups. There are some examples below:

From 6 months:

- Mashed or soft cooked fruit and vegetables like parsnip, potato, yam, sweet potato, carrot, apple or pear, all cooled before eating, or soft fruit like peach, melon, soft ripe banana or avocado as finger foods or mashed
- Baby rice or baby cereal mixed with your baby's usual milk
- Keep feeding them breast milk or infant formula as well but don't give them whole cows' milk as a drink until they are a year old.

From 12 months:

- Your baby will now be eating three meals a day, chopped if required, plus breast milk or whole cows' milk (or alternatives) and nutritious snacks like fruit, vegetable sticks, toast with avocado and rice cakes and cottage cheese
- They can now drink whole cows' milk. Choose full-fat dairy products because children under two need the extra fat and vitamins found in them. From two years old if they are a good eater and growing well they can have semi-skimmed milk. From five years old 1% fat and skimmed milk is OK

- You can give your baby:
 - Three to four servings a day of starchy food such as potatoes, bread and rice
 - Three to four servings a day of fruit and vegetables
 - Minimum of two servings of dairy products (or alternatives)
 - Two servings a day of meat, fish, eggs, dhal or other pulses (beans and lentils).

If your child's nursery does provide the food, you should see what meals they are providing so together you can complement one another and ensure your child is receiving a healthy, balanced diet. They should display menus or have them available for you to see.

Top tips for weaning include:

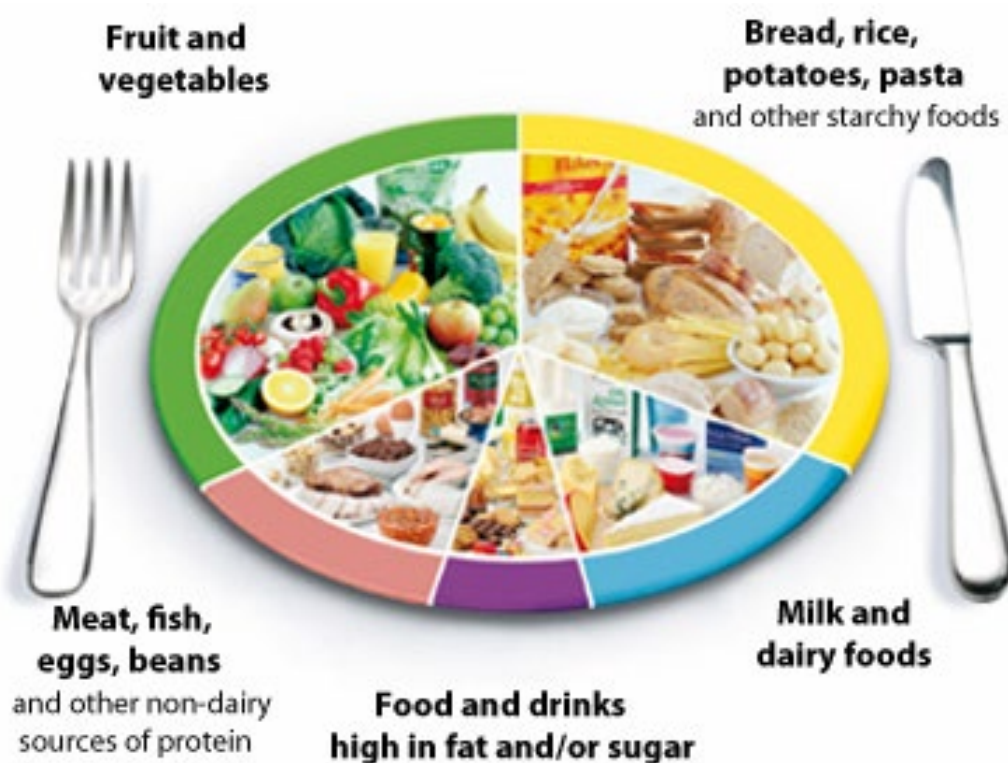
- Don't leave your baby alone with food
- Take time and go with your child's pace, do not force-feed your baby. If you are worried they are not eating enough speak to your health visitor
- Try to ensure that your baby associates food and mealtimes with pleasure rather than stress
- Be prepared to let babies explore their food. They will make a mess so cover floors and this will make clearing up easier
- Involve your baby in family mealtimes so they can see others eating and be part of the routine
- Make sure your child is sat up properly when feeding
- Provide a healthy diet. This way they are more likely to keep eating nutritious foods as they grow up. It is a great habit to get into and one that will hopefully make your life a little easier as they get older
- Provide a good mix of colours, textures and flavours when your child is learning about food. Remember that babies and young children are also affected by how food looks just as we are, so providing foods that do not have different colours or textures may not be exciting or inviting, for example, mash potato and cheese sauce have the same colour and texture, but adding pureed carrot will make it more nutritious and may make it more inviting
- Learn what to do in a situation when your baby is choking or, as is more common, gagging. A health visitor, nurse or a doctor will quickly be able to show you, or you could complete a Paediatric First Aid course
- If you are using food for sensory or messy play then please use the same weaning and choking guidelines and supervise all activities carefully.

Food refusal and fussy eaters

It's natural for you as parents to worry about whether your child is getting enough food, especially if they refuse to eat sometimes. Many young children go through phases of deciding what they do and do not want to eat. This is all part of young children's development as they begin to understand that they have a choice and want to make the most of this. Try not to worry about what your child eats in a day, or if they don't eat everything in a meal. It's more important to think about what they eat over a week.

If your child is active, gaining weight and not ill then it is more than likely that they are receiving enough food. Providing a nutritionally balanced diet with food from the main food groups (starchy foods, e.g. bread and potatoes, fruit and vegetables, meat, fish, eggs, beans, milk and dairy foods) will ensure they gain the essential nutrients. If there is a fruit or vegetable that your child particularly does not like, try to disguise this with other foods where possible, e.g. in a spaghetti bolognese or pasta sauce. Don't worry if your child seems to be eating the same favourites for a while, just try to introduce other food over time.

The eat well plate (below) shows the different types of food we need to eat – and in what proportion – to have a well-balanced and healthy diet.



Top tips to support food refusal or fussy eaters include:

- Eat together where possible so your child can see you eating the same foods, try to make these times fun and sociable. Avoid just talking about the food and what they are eating, other conversations can distract them from thinking about what they are eating and support their social skills and language development
- Look at portion size and ensure it's appropriate for your child's age. It's better to give smaller portions and give praise for eating some of it
- Do not force them to eat and try not (although difficult) to become frustrated – just take the food away. This way eating will not become too much of an issue
- Avoid having meal times when your child is tired
- Where possible allow extra time for mealtimes and eating socially
- Avoid giving too many snacks between meals
- Avoid using puddings, desserts or sweets as rewards for eating all their main meal. Stickers or non-food times could be used as rewards for eating or trying new foods, although external rewards have their limitations.

If your child attends nursery, speak to your child's key person about your concerns. They will monitor your child's intake of food and drink and you can ask them to share this information with you at the end of each day. If your child is refusing to eat at nursery or doesn't seem to be eating enough, share with them what you are doing at home. Together you could make a plan to detail how you will encourage your child to eat well and use a consistent approach to avoid confusion for the child.

Top tips for nurseries

Tips to support fussy eaters as well as the above also include:

- Sitting fussy eaters with good eaters
- Offering children opportunities to try new foods but having a tissue in case they would like to spit it out
- Giving smaller portions to begin with and then offer second helping.

Working together will ensure a consistent approach and this is essential to enable all those involved with mealtimes to follow the same strategies. You may also like to share this with other family members such as grandparents, especially if your child has some of their meals there.

If you feel your child is not gaining weight, then see your health visitor or doctor who will be able to offer further support and referrals.

Toilet training

Children are individuals and develop at their own pace. Some children will control their bladder and bowels sooner than others, but this can only happen when they are physically ready, which includes the development of their nervous system in order to send messages to and from their brain. Because of this, it is best not to compare your child with other children of the same age.

Top tips for identifying if your child is ready:

- They are beginning to know when they have a wet or soiled nappy and may tell you what they have done
- They have longer periods of dryness.

You can begin to prepare children for toilet training by having a potty around the house and letting them see others using the toilet. Explain to them in terms they understand. You could also share story books about using the toilet. The following stories are available:

- *Pirate Pete's Potty*, Andrea Pinnington
- *Princess Polly's Potty*, Andrea Pinnington
- *I Want My Potty!* Tony Ross.

Encourage your child to use the potty or toilet but if they are upset or seem to be having regular accidents, do not be afraid to stop and try again a bit later. Try not to make a fuss if they do have an accident, as this may make them feel worried and make the process more stressful.

Praising your child for using the potty or toilet or offering stickers or rewards may encourage them to use it if they are ready but remember, your child may not be physically ready so this may not always work.

If your child attends nursery you should talk to their key person about preparing your child for using the potty or toilet. Together you should work out a plan to ensure that you are both using consistent approaches and language.

In a busy nursery your child may 'forget' to go, so you could agree that the key person reminds your child more regularly. Remember to take lots of spare clothes to begin with, including shoes and socks. During this time you may find it useful to send your child to nursery in shoes that can be rinsed or washed easily. Share what you are doing at home, e.g. any rewards or star charts so the nursery can contribute as well.

Having regular conversations about your child's progress together will support you in ensuring that it is the right time, and your child is ready.

If you are worried about your child, talk to your GP or health visitor to get some guidance. Some children that may have illnesses, Special Educational Needs or Disabilities may find it more difficult to learn functions such as toilet training.

You and your child may be referred to a clinic for expert help. You can also contact [Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence \(ERIC\)](#) for information.



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Our factsheets are written by early years experts for the early years workforce. Most NDNA factsheets are free to our members.

NDNA is the national charity and membership association representing children's nurseries across the UK. We are a charity that believes in quality and sustainability, so we put our members' businesses at the very heart of ours.

We are the voice of the 21,000-strong nursery sector, an integral part of the lives of more than a million young children and their families. We provide information, training and advice to support nurseries and the 250,000 people who work in them to deliver world-class early learning and childcare.

See the full range of NDNA factsheets at www.ndna.org.uk/factsheets

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