

Is my baby ready for solid foods?

When?

Exclusive Breastfeeding provides all your baby needs for the first six months (26 weeks).^{*} Readiness for foods other than milk is a stage in your baby's development. Your baby may be ready for other foods if your baby:

- can stay sitting upright without support and hold his head steady,
- has the hand control to pick up a small item and move it to his mouth all by himself,
- can move food around his mouth with his tongue.



These are NOT good signs of readiness for (complementary) solid foods - as they could mean other things:

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| ◇ Teething, drooling, or chewing fists | ◇ Watching other people eating |
| ◇ Low weight gain | ◇ "Looking hungry" |
| ◇ Waking more frequently at night or being unsettled | ◇ Parents seeking a new activity for their baby |

What?

Foods given in addition to breastfeeding are called *complementary foods*. This means they complement mother's milk or formula milk rather than replace it.

The food a mother eats gives a flavour to her milk. The baby is familiar with these tastes and ready to try well mashed family foods. This can motivate the whole family to eat healthy foods. Avoid giving sweet food as a treat or to soothe baby.

Mother's milk or manufactured infant formula continues to be the main drink in the first year. Babies can continue on infant milks if not breastfeeding and do not need special follow-on milks.

How?

How the baby is fed is as important as *what* the baby is fed. Smiles and patience help the baby to learn this new skill of eating.

Feeding the baby is a time to interact with the baby rather than only focus on the amount of food baby eats. Include the baby in family meals so the baby sees other people eating.

Some babies may prefer foods after they have had a milk feed rather than when they are very hungry. Go at the baby's speed and stop feeding when the baby shows they have had enough. Don't force the baby to eat more than they want.

^{*}Sometimes a baby may have a special health need that may require early or extra food in addition to breastfeeding. Your dietitian and doctor will discuss this with you if needed. Some parents give small quantities of food before 6 months but do not give foods other than mother's milk or formula before your baby is 17 weeks old as it can make baby ill. Talk with your Public Health Nurse about foods to avoid before 6 months.

Information leaflets on starting complementary feeding

Introducing complementary foods. Factsheet 7 (2008), HSE.

<http://www.breastfeeding.ie/uploads/files/factsheet07.pdf>

Starting to Spoonfeed your baby (HSE 2006) <http://www.healthpromotion.ie/publication/>

Weaning made easy: moving from milk to family meals (2011). Public Health Agency Northern Ireland. Available in English, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese and Russian.

<http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/weaning-made-easy-moving-milk-family-meals>

Introducing Solid Foods, giving your baby a better start in life (2011). UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative and UK Department of Health/NHS

http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Baby_Friendly/Leaflets/3/introducing-solid-foods.pdf