

# THE FIRST 1,000 DAYS: A CRITICAL WINDOW FOR LIFELONG HEALTH



PRECONCEPTION



PREGNANCY



BIRTH - 6 MONTHS



6-12 MONTHS



1-3 YEARS

The first 1,000 days in the life of your little one is a uniquely special time that has a very real influence on their future. Their rate of growth and development is far greater than at any other stage in life – it's when the foundations for their future health are being laid.

## EARLY LIFE NUTRITION (ELN)

Nutrition from preconception to pregnancy and during the first years of a child's life provides the essential building blocks for brain development, healthy growth and a strong immune system. In fact, a growing body of scientific evidence shows that the foundations of a person's lifelong health — including their vulnerability to diseases such as obesity and allergy — are largely set during this 1,000 day window.

## INTRODUCING SOLIDS

We all know that moving on to solids ('weaning') is a necessary step for babies. However, the timing and way it's done can have a profound affect on their growth and development, and in establishing healthy eating patterns, helping protect against obesity and allergies for life.

This guide aims to support you through this critical window of opportunity.

# INTRODUCING SOLIDS

## HOW TO START WEANING AND WHY IT MATTERS

A baby's birth weight approximately doubles by 6 months of age and triples by one year – a growth rate greater than any other time of life. At around 6 months of age, human breast milk or infant formula milk alone is no longer enough to meet their nutritional needs, so introduction of solid foods to the diet is essential – a process known as 'weaning'.

Through the weaning period, the baby will gradually progress to a fully mixed diet with foods of different textures and tastes. The goal is that by one year of age, they'll be eating family foods (but without things like added sugar or salt).

A baby's introduction to different tastes and textures is vital for developing their acceptance of a wide range of healthy foods and may minimise potential fussy eating later on.

The progression from smooth to lumpy purees, and on to more complex and varied textures like mashed and chopped foods helps develop their physical capabilities. From exploring their mouth with their fingers, to building strength and stamina in their jaw muscles, it all contributes to their development.

THE WAY SOLID FOODS ARE INTRODUCED IS IMPORTANT FOR:

- ★ HELPING DEVELOP HEALTHY EATING HABITS
- ★ HELPING DEVELOP PHYSICAL SKILLS (ORAL AND FINE MOTOR MOVEMENT)
- ★ ENCOURAGING THEM TO EAT INDEPENDENTLY
- ★ GETTING THEM USED TO EATING WITH THE FAMILY



## WHEN SHOULD YOU INTRODUCE SOLIDS?

Guidelines recommend that you breast feed exclusively until your baby is 6 months old and continue to breast feed, while introducing solids. Breast milk has many long term health benefits for your infant, including reducing their risk of obesity and allergy. Every baby is different, but at around 6 months of age, most babies show an interest in the food you eat and their appetite is increasing. Never introduce solids before the age of 17 weeks.

### SIGNS YOUR BABY MAY BE READY FOR SOLIDS

- They're hungry and restless after a milk feed.
- They've lost the 'tongue reflex' that makes them push food out of their mouths.
- They can sit propped in a sitting position and hold their head steady.
- They open their mouths and 'chew' when they see other people eating.

## GETTING STARTED

Weaning can be messy and frustrating, but it should ideally be a gentle and positive experience for both of you. Keep the focus on *trying* new foods, not necessarily eating them! The very first solids are as important for practice with the mechanics of eating as they are for nutritional value. Infants may need to be offered a food up to 10 times before they decide they like it (and most could end up on them or on the floor!). It's all part of the learning process, so be patient.



### TIPS FOR THEIR FIRST TRY OF SOLIDS

- Decide on a day that suits you and your baby, and a time when you're both relaxed.
- Don't rush your baby. It takes time to learn how to swallow and adapt to new tastes.
- Lunchtime is a good time to try solids as babies are usually alert and hungry and eager for playtime.
- Use a soft teaspoon (e.g. silicone) as it's gentler on teething gums.
- Start with one or two spoons of food and wait until your baby opens their mouth to offer more.

Babies may appear to 'gag' at first. Don't be alarmed, this is normal and part of learning to swallow.

If your baby refuses food, stop and try again in a few days. Never force solids on a baby.

Give it a few days before introducing the next food to give your baby time to get to know different tastes. Iron is essential for growth and development. A baby's iron store declines from birth and requires additional sources from around 6 months. It doesn't matter what order foods are introduced as long as they're iron-rich and nutritious, and prepared appropriately for your baby's developmental stage.

## REMEMBER, YOU'RE THEIR ROLE MODEL

They watch your every move and expression, so show them the happy, engaged face you want to see back! Encourage them to mimic you as you go through all the sensations of experiencing a new food:

- Try the new food with your baby, smell it yourself.
- Touch the food with your lips and taste a little.
- Show them how you're enjoying the new experience! Then do it again!

Enjoying meals as a family, and setting a good example in terms of the foods you eat will help create positive eating habits for good nutrition throughout childhood and beyond.



# DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES AND FOODS TO INTRODUCE

## FROM AROUND 6 MONTHS

### DEVELOPMENT

- Can hold their head up, use their tongue to move food around and chew a little.



### FLUIDS

- Continue to breast feed as long as you can – every feed contributes to their lifelong health, including helping prevent obesity in later life.
- Offer breast milk or infant formula before the solid food.
- Water can be introduced (boiled and cooled if it's tap water), though breast fed babies don't usually need it.
- *Pasteurised full-cream cows' milk should not be given* to infants under 12 months of age as a main drink.

### TEXTURE

- Mashed or pureed (without lumps, skins, pips or seeds), to get them used to swallowing. You can push the mashed food through a fine sieve to get rid of any lumps.



### FOODS

- Start with small amounts of iron-rich food e.g. fortified rice cereal or cooked and pureed fish, poultry, meat and liver (well cooked) and vegetables and fruit like pumpkin, potato, zucchini, soy beans, lentils, apple and pear. Other suitable foods are smooth porridge, yoghurt and cooked plain tofu. Variety is key, don't be afraid to try other foods.
- Unless your baby has been confirmed to have an allergy, don't avoid 'allergenic' foods (e.g. egg, fish, peanut butter), as early introduction is thought to actually protect against those allergies. Aim to introduce all food types including allergenic foods before 8 months.



## FROM AROUND 8-12 MONTHS

### DEVELOPMENT

- Able to sit and manage finger foods.
- Have some teeth, and can move their tongue sideways to push food to them and bite and chew a little.



### FLUIDS

- Offer solid foods first then breast milk, which is still important, and should be offered as a top up as your baby switches to a solids based diet.

### TEXTURE

- A mix of chopped and finger foods. This allows them to explore with their fingers and mouth and improve coordination and jaw muscle strength.



### FOODS

- Cooked vegetables (e.g. carrot, potato, tomato) and apples, some raw fruit (e.g. banana, melon), whole egg, cereals (e.g. wheat, oats), bread, pasta, nut pastes, toast fingers and rusks, dairy foods such as full-fat cheese, custards and yoghurt.
- Cows' milk products like full-fat yoghurt, cheese and custard are fine (but not pasteurised full-cream cows' milk as a main drink).
- Eating 'allergenic' foods like dairy and eggs may help reduce the risk of developing allergies to certain foods.
- Introducing a variety of flavours now helps prevent fussy eating later.



## FROM 12 MONTHS

### DEVELOPMENT

- Their jaw is stable and they can chew with a more circular motion.

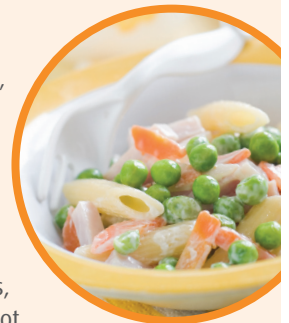


### FLUIDS

- Continue breast feeding as long as you and your child desire as every breast feed contributes to a healthier future for them.
- Your infant should now tolerate pasteurised full-cream cows' milk (but don't introduce reduced fat milk until at least 2 years of age).

### TEXTURE

- A variety of normal 'family food' textures is important to promote chewing for developing jaw muscles, necessary not only for eating but also talking whilst preventing their preference for soft foods in later life.
- Take care with hard foods, as choking is still a risk.



### FOODS

- From 12 months of age, infants should be fed frequent, small, helpings of foods from all 5 main groups.
- They should have family foods and follow healthy eating practices along with the whole family.



# THE WAY SOLIDS ARE INTRODUCED CAN HELP BUILD A STRONG IMMUNE SYSTEM, REDUCE ALLERGY RISK AND HELP PREVENT OBESITY



## THINGS TO WATCH

- Gradually introducing different foods can make it easier for you to recognise any particular sensitivities or allergies.
- Do not give whole nuts and other hard foods that might cause choking.
- Don't add sugar or honey, avoid juices and sugar sweetened drinks, and limit foods with added sugar.
- Avoid foods with high levels of saturated fat and low nutrient value. Your child's rapid growth means they need a diet dense in nutrients – not 'empty calories'.
- Avoid adding salt, or stock cubes to your baby's food. Little kidneys don't process salt well.
- Make sure everything's clean when preparing and handling food, as babies' less developed immune systems put them at greater risk of food poisoning.
- Use freshly cooked food, cool foods quickly in the fridge and use within a day or freeze them.
- Always supervise your baby while feeding.

## ABOUT DANONE NUTRICIA

This guide is brought to you by Danone Nutricia Early Life Nutrition. Our mission is to stand by mums to nurture new lives, particularly by encouraging healthy, balanced nutrition for mothers, babies and toddlers.

Nutrition and breast feeding have a critical influence during the first 1,000 days from preconception through to toddlerhood. Our aim is to help parents and carers be aware of the importance of good nutrition in early life and make the right nutrition choices for themselves and their babies, to help establish the foundations for their child's future health.



## MORE INFORMATION

- Infant feeding guidelines can be found at [www.health.govt.nz](http://www.health.govt.nz) and [www.nhmrc.gov.au](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au)
- Learn more about the first 1,000 days at [www.earlylifenutrition.org](http://www.earlylifenutrition.org)
- If you wish to speak to someone about Introducing Solids call our Care-line free on: **1800 060 057** (Australia) or **0800 688 742** (New Zealand)

**BREAST MILK IS BEST FOR BABIES:** Professional advice should be followed before using an infant formula. Introducing partial bottle feeding could negatively affect breast feeding. Good maternal nutrition is important for breast feeding and reversing a decision not to breast feed may be difficult. Infant formula should be used as directed. Proper use of an infant formula is important to the health of the infant. Social and financial implications should be considered when selecting a method of feeding.