

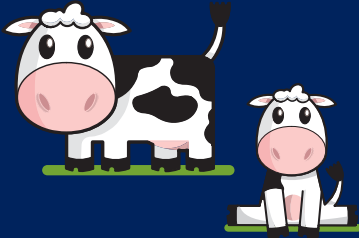


Dairy
Food for Life



A GUIDE TO
Weaning





Dairy Den

health and wellbeing programme for growing children

Your child's early years are a constant journey of discovery and the NDC's Dairy Den is here to help you along the way, answering all the questions you have in relation to diet and nutrition.

Our range of practical and easy-to-follow guides are designed to support your child's growth and development from weaning right through to the school-age years. This range of guides evolves in accordance with your child's stage of life: when you sign up to be part of the Dairy Den, we'll ensure the right information arrives on your doorstep just when you need it.

Dairy Den has lots of great advice to encourage healthy eating from a young age. We explain the nutrients critical to fast-growing bodies as well as why three portions of dairy a day are so important for overall health and wellbeing.

All Dairy Den information is science-based and supported by the most up-to-date research as compiled by the NDC, so from the first spoonfuls of food to the first tentative steps, just like your child, you'll know you're in safe hands.

The NDC Team



Introduction

Weaning is the time when we gradually introduce solid foods into a baby's diet. It's the time when milk alone is not enough to meet all of a baby's nutritional needs and solid food becomes essential.

Eating well in early life is important because it impacts on the short- and long-term health of the baby. Because no two babies are the same, feeding each baby will be slightly different, but this booklet will give you some general guidelines and directions to help you during this wonderful, yet sometimes challenging time.

When is a good time to start weaning?

Breast milk is an amazing and natural food for babies. It provides all the nourishment your baby needs up to six months of age. It is best to exclusively breastfeed your baby for the first six months and then introduce solid foods. You can then continue to breastfeed right up to the age of two or even older if you like, and at the same time broaden the range of foods your baby eats.

Formula-fed babies can be weaned earlier, at some time between four and six months, depending on your baby's hunger levels. Don't worry – your baby will let you know when he/she is ready! This is an important developmental stage, so hold out until the four month milestone, and don't delay weaning later than six months in order to give your baby the best start on solids.

Throughout weaning, breast or formula milk plays a vital role, right up until the age of one year. By this age, your baby will be enjoying a varied diet. It is only after your baby's first birthday that cow's milk is suitable to give as a drink; however, small amounts of cow's milk (full-fat) may be used in the preparation of your baby's food from six months of age.

Introducing solids at the right time gives your baby the best opportunity to grow and develop. Introducing solids too early or too late can interfere with your baby's development.

The What, When & How to start weaning

What?

- Your baby's first weaning foods should be smooth, bland and runny with no lumps.
- Milk (breast or formula) should provide most of your baby's nourishment until they are eating a fully mixed or varied diet.
- As you introduce more solid foods, your baby will drink less milk. Continue to

breastfeed on demand until 12 months of age, or if using formula milk continue with the usual amount during the early stages of weaning, decreasing the volume gradually to approximately 500-600 ml (17-20 oz) per day during the later stages.

- Learning to take food from a spoon is a new experience for babies. It takes time and patience. Begin using a small flat spoon, only half filling it.
- Don't expect your baby to accept all new foods the first time you offer them – you may have to offer it up to 14 times or more before they accept it!
- As you go through the months of weaning with your baby, your aim should be to introduce a wide variety of tastes and textures. Use the table on the centre page spread as a guide.

When?

- Offer new foods at a time when the baby is relaxed but alert. Midday or afternoons are usually the best times.
- Offer the spoon at the end or part-way through a milk feed. Begin with just 1-2 spoonfuls.
- Once your baby is eating three spoon-feeds in a day, containing a wide variety of foods, you can start spacing the spoon-feeds and the milk-feeds apart.
- Aim for three milk feeds a day e.g. early morning, mid-morning and at bedtime, with solid foods at breakfast, lunch and evening meal.

How?

- Allow yourself and your baby plenty of time to enjoy your first attempt at weaning. Don't rush – relax and enjoy the new experience.
- Use a high chair once your baby can sit unsupported. Ideally position your baby so they can see your face clearly.
- Be ready for some fun! Feeding can often be a messy experience. Have a supply of bibs and a mat on the floor but really try not to worry about the mess.
- Always test the temperature of the food before giving it to your baby.
- Introduce one new food at a time, leaving a few days before you introduce another new food. This helps your baby to get used to new tastes and textures and will also allow you to notice any reactions to a new food.
- When your baby is accepting 5-6 teaspoons at a meal, you can start offering a second spoon-feed in the day.
 - Remember your baby's appetite will vary from day to day. Babies will show you they are full by turning their head away. If they are full, don't be tempted to get the last few spoons into them.
 - Never leave your baby alone when they are eating.



A closer look at drinks

- Milk (breast or formula) and cooled, pre-boiled water (if necessary) are the only suitable drinks for your baby before the age of six months.
- From the age of six months, encourage your child to drink from a cup or beaker, and from 12 months of age your child should only be drinking from a cup or beaker without a lid.
- Fruit juices are not necessary in your child's diet, however if offering such drinks, you can do so from six months of age. It is extremely important that fruit juices do not replace their milk drink. Additionally, ensure fruit juices are well diluted i.e. at the very least five parts water (cooled, pre-boiled) to one part juice and try to confine them to mealtimes.
- Tea, coffee, most natural mineral and spring waters, drinks with artificial sweeteners, fizzy drinks, cola drinks and drinks with a high sugar content are not suitable for your baby.
- Cow's milk is not suitable as a drink until your baby reaches his or her first birthday. However, from six months of age, you can use small amounts of cow's milk when preparing your baby's meals. Begin with full-fat milk, semi-skimmed cow's milk is suitable from the age of two years as long as your child is thriving and eating a good, varied diet. Skimmed milk is not recommended for children under five years.

Finger Foods

Once your baby has become used to eating simple purées, he/she will be ready for more adventurous combinations of foods, with stronger flavours and thicker textures. Every baby develops at his or her own pace, but you can begin to introduce soft finger foods between seven and nine months of age increasing the variety as your baby progresses. Remember, never leave your baby alone when eating in case of choking.

Suitable finger foods	
Soft ripe fruits e.g. banana Softly cooked vegetables e.g. soft carrot sticks	Cheese cubes or slices Fingers of toast (without crust) Light crackers Baby rusks

Remember – babies may not accept all foods the first time they taste them. You might have to offer a food numerous times before it is accepted. Be patient and try to identify a variety of foods that your baby enjoys.

	Starting weaning	Two weeks after starting to spoonfeed
How much milk?	Throughout the weaning process, milk will remain a very important source of nutrients for your baby. During these early stages, breastfeed on demand or continue to give your baby the usual amount of formula milk.	
How many meals a day?	1-2 meals containing 1-6 teaspoons, but remember to start small i.e. 1-2 teaspoons.	2-3 meals increasing to 5-10 teaspoons at each meal.
What texture?	Smooth, thin purée with no lumps.	Smooth, slightly thicker purée than the first two weeks but with no lumps. You can achieve this consistency by increasing the amount of food and/or adding less liquid.
Which foods?	As per previous stage, plus:	
	Cereal Foods: Gluten-free cereals e.g. baby rice.	Cereal Foods: Same as previous stage and from six months of age gluten-containing foods can be introduced.
	Fruit & Vegetables: Puréed root vegetables such as carrots and parsnips. Puréed ripe fruit e.g. banana Stewed fruit e.g. stewed apples.	Fruit & Vegetables: Broaden variety, for example include vegetables such as potatoes, broccoli, spinach, peas and cauliflower and fruits such as peaches, nectarines, plums and melon.
	Meat & Alternatives: Once spoonfeeding has been established, meat and alternatives can be introduced. This is typically about two weeks after starting to spoonfeed.	Meat & Alternatives: Well-cooked, tender, puréed meat, poultry and fish (no bones). Puréed peas, beans and lentils.
Dairy: Cow's milk should not be offered as a drink until 12 months of age. From six months, small amounts may be used in the preparation of foods. Until this age, use expressed breast milk or formula milk.		

Table to be used only as a guide.

6-9 months	9-12 months
<p>Throughout the weaning process, milk will remain a very important source of nutrients for your baby, however, as your baby accepts more solid foods, the volume of milk should decrease gradually and accordingly. Breastfeed on demand or give your baby a minimum of 500 -600mls (17-20 oz) of formula milk per day.</p>	
<p>3 meals, approximately 2-4 tablespoons at each meal.</p>	<p>3 meals, 4-6 tablespoons at each meal, plus 1-2 snacks.</p>
<p>Minced or mashed; less fine consistency than previous stages and as your baby progresses the meal can contain soft lumps. As progress is made, you can also introduce soft finger foods.</p>	<p>Chunky mashed and minced foods progressing to finely chopped.</p> <p>Introduce more finger foods.</p>
<p>As per previous stages, plus:</p>	
<p>Cereal Foods: Other breakfast cereals such as Weetabix and porridge, pasta, bread and rusks.</p>	
<p>Fruit & Vegetables: Continue to broaden variety, introducing stronger flavours as baby progresses, for example, include vegetables such as onions, peppers and mushrooms and include citrus fruits (remove pith, pips and seeds) and berries (use metal sieve to remove pips and seeds).</p>	
<p>Meat & Alternatives: Hard boiled or scrambled eggs (cooked thoroughly).</p>	<p>Meat & Alternatives: Broaden variety and introduce stronger flavoured meat and fish (ensure all bones are removed).</p>
<p>Dairy: Yogurt (full-fat), cheeses (pasteurised) e.g. cheddar and fresh cream. You can now use small amounts of full-fat cow's milk in the preparation of your baby's food e.g. mashed potatoes, sauces and puréed vegetables, but don't offer cow's milk as a drink until 12 months of age.</p>	

Iron

Babies are born with sufficient iron stores for about the first six months of life, but after that they need to get iron from their food. It is important to include iron-rich foods when you are weaning your baby.

Iron contributes to the normal formation of red blood cells. Red meat, such as lamb or beef, is the best source of iron. Other sources include fortified breakfast cereals, green leafy vegetables and pulses such as kidney beans and lentils. Vitamin C helps to absorb non-meat sources of iron, so combining iron-rich foods with vitamin C-rich foods (berries, citrus fruits, green vegetables) in the same meal will help your baby to make the most of the available iron.

Home-made versus commercially-prepared baby food

Both home-made and commercial baby foods are suitable for babies.

The main advantage of using home-made foods is that you know exactly what ingredients were used and how each meal was made. Additionally, such foods tend to be less bland than commercial baby foods, and therefore, may help your baby become familiar with more flavours and also familiar with foods eaten by other family members. Remember, do not add salt or sugar to your baby's food. Home-made baby food can also be more economical, so try to use the commercial baby foods only occasionally. For example, they can be very convenient when you are travelling with your baby.

Food Safety & Hygiene

Babies and young children are especially vulnerable to the effects of food poisoning, so it is essential to carefully prepare and store your baby's food.

Food can be pre-prepared as long as it is stored correctly (appropriately covered, in a fridge and use within 24 hours). It is also possible to freeze pre-prepared food using suitable containers or bags; ideally defrost the food in a fridge overnight. Reheat the food thoroughly and allow it to cool adequately before feeding it to your baby.

In the first six months of a baby's life, extra care is necessary to meticulously clean and sterilise all utensils used in preparing and serving your baby's food. Once your baby is mobile and exploring objects with their mouths, hygiene is still extremely important and at this stage you can just sterilise the bottles and teats. Use a dishwasher if you have one as the temperature is much higher than hand-washing water. Dry everything with kitchen paper or leave to drip dry.

Useful Equipment:

- Steriliser
- Ice-cube trays, freezer bags and labels: These are useful for pre-preparing meals. Ice-cube trays help in the storage of small portion sizes during the early stages of weaning. Try freezing small portions of cooled, pre-prepared food in ice-cube trays wrapped in a freezer bag, then once frozen, quickly transfer the individual food portions into a suitable freezer bag or container and return to the freezer immediately. Remember to label and date all stored food.
- Food processor or blender – ideal for obtaining the right consistency of your baby's food
- Fork and sieve – useful for puréeing small portions and removing lumps, seeds, pips, skin etc.
- Plastic bowl, plastic spoon and suitable cup – use a shallow spoon and keep a spare set handy
- Suitable chair
- Bibs and facecloth

Food Allergies

There is often confusion regarding the introducing of foods which may potentially cause an allergic reaction. The NDC advises you to consult your GP, public health nurse or a dietitian if you are concerned about introducing potentially allergenic foods into your baby's diet, or indeed, if you suspect that your baby has a food allergy. They can provide advice on an individual basis, and refer you to an allergy specialist if necessary.

Some general guidelines to note:

- Foods should be introduced one at a time, so that if a reaction occurs you can readily identify the problem food.
- Give each new food for three days consecutively, leaving a few days before you introduce another new food.
- Once a new food is introduced, keep it in the diet regularly.

Specific advice on certain foods

- Avoid adding salt and sugar to young children's meals.
- Avoid honey until after 12 months of age.
- Cow's milk is not suitable as a drink until 12 months of age, but small amounts may be used in the preparation of meals from six months.
- Do not offer undercooked eggs or unpasteurised cheeses to young children.
- Avoid whole and chopped nuts until the age of five years due to the risk of choking (and see section on 'Food Allergies').

From 12 months

As your baby approaches their first birthday, they should be well on their way to eating three main meals a day, containing a combination of starchy food, vegetable or animal protein, and fruit and vegetables. They will manage coarser textures, and snacks served as finger foods can help to keep their energy levels up between meals. Their diet can now include virtually all the foods the rest of the family eat with a number of exceptions such as lightly cooked eggs, whole and chopped nuts, unpasteurised cheese, and low-fat or high fibre products. Indeed, many dishes can be shared by all the family, as long as your baby's portion is unsalted.

- Continue to encourage your baby to try a variety of tastes and textures.
- Encourage your baby to develop a structured meal pattern – three main meals each day, plus 2-3 small snacks.

Life is too short to cook a different meal for every member of the family, so introduce new foods gently but persistently into your children's diets in the early years and save yourself time and stress in the future!

References and further reading

Health Promotion Unit (2006). *Starting to Spoonfeed your Baby*.

Dunne T, Farrell P & Kelly V. *Feed Your Child Well. A Handbook for Parents in Ireland*.

A&A Farmar 2008.

Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute: www.indi.ie



The National Dairy Council's packaging mark clearly identifies milk and cream products that have been farmed and processed within the Republic of Ireland. Purchasing products displaying this mark provides assurance that you are supporting thousands of Irish jobs.



The Fresh Milk Club provides an affordable, year-round daily supply of fresh milk to children in Irish schools. To ensure that your child or pupils are benefiting from this nutritious addition to their daily lunchboxes, contact the NDC for a free information pack.

www.thefreshmilkclub.ie



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