

# Feeding Babies and Young Children (6 months to 2 years old)

## Weaning



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## Weaning

Weaning is the phase during which the baby changes from a **purely fluid** diet of breastmilk or infant formula to one which contains all **varieties of food** typical of the family.

### Start Weaning at the Right Time

Introduction of complementary food should begin when the baby is at the appropriate stage of development, which will vary between individuals. Generally, babies about 6 months of age are physiologically and developmentally ready for solid food (like having better head control, being able to sit upright, having better oral-motor co-ordination and better functioning of gut and kidneys). Moreover, after about 6 months of age, breastmilk or infant formula alone can no longer meet the baby's nutritional requirements. Solid food has to be introduced.

Weaning that starts too late (after 6 months old) may affect growth as babies need additional nutrients from solid food apart from those supplied by breastmilk or formula milk. It may also lead to problem in accepting solid food later on, since babies take time to learn chewing and swallowing, as well as tasting food of different texture.

### Weaning is a Step-by-Step Process

Weaning is important for developing good feeding habits of the child in the future.



1. During the weaning period, babies learn to adapt from the simple taste of milk to different taste and texture of solid food.
2. Introduce food of different texture gradually from thin, smooth, creamy and puree consistency to thickened and coarse texture.

3. Start with a small amount of about one teaspoonful and increase gradually.
4. Introduce one new food at a time. Try for a few days to a week before switching to another.

### Prepare a Meal

Always wash your hands with liquid soap and running water before preparing meals. (Please refer to leaflet "Guidelines for Good Handwashing")



### How to Choose?

#### Milk

At the beginning of weaning, breastmilk or infant formula remains the most important nutrient source. Solid food must not be given in a way that will dramatically reduce milk intake. Add solid food and cut down milk intake at the same time gradually. There is no medical evidence to support changing to high protein follow-on formula.

#### Schedule

There are NO hard and fast rules but the following schedule of feeding pattern is suggested :



- 6 to 9 months : 3-4 milk feeds with 1-2 times of solid food a day
- 9 to 12 months: 2-3 milk feeds with 2-3 times of solid food a day
- 1 to 2 years : 1-2 milk feeds with 4-5 times of solid food a day

By about 2 years, the child will develop the dietary habit of taking 3 meals a day with 2 additional snacks in between. Weaning can be considered completed by then.

## Food in the Weaning Diet

It is important that a great variety of food be selected to enable children to obtain sufficient and balanced nutrients for healthy growth.

- Add **minimal quantity** of seasoning such as sugar, salt and oil when cooking.
- **Cereals** will gradually become the main source of food intake. The first choice of **cereal** is rice and then followed by oat and wheat.
- **Meat and eggs** are rich in protein, minerals and vitamins. Preferably, give chicken, fish, pork and egg yolk at the beginning. Beef and egg white can be introduced at a later stage as they are more likely to cause allergy.
- There are many kinds of **vegetables**. Do not confine to just a few kinds. At the beginning of weaning, use a food processor or masher to crush vegetables to make it easier for swallowing. Other methods of preparing vegetables include shredding, cutting, stewing, or putting into soup or congee.
- **Fruits** can be given in the form of juice or puree. Try apple, papaya, pear and banana first. Orange is more likely to cause allergy and can be introduced at a later stage.

## Prevent Injuries

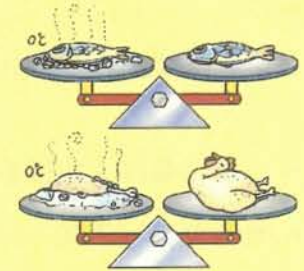
- Encourage babies to eat by themselves. Parents should stand by their side to watch out for injuries such as choking.
- Nuts, popcorn, raw peas and similar hard food should be avoided, since they can be breathed into the airway and cause suffocation.



- Carefully remove seeds from fruits and vegetables, such as watermelon, grapes and tomatoes.
- Fish bones pose a risk to babies and children. Fine bones from fresh fish should carefully be removed before giving to the child, but this might not be done easily. Frozen fish fillet is a safe alternative.

## Is Fresh the Best?

- The nutritional value of chilled or frozen meat is the same as fresh meat.
- Remember to defrost and cook frozen meat or fish properly.



## Vegetarian Diet

- Children should take appropriately planned vegetarian diets help to meet the nutrient needs that required for their growth and development.
- Eating a variety of foods at the same meal will enhance absorption of dietary iron from plant foods. Good vegetarian sources of iron are: breakfast cereals (e.g. oatmeal), baked beans and leafy green vegetables.
- For strict vegetarian children, vegetarian foods with nutrition supplement are much preferable. Consult your family doctors or dietitians for any concerns.



## Commercial Complementary Weaning Food

- Commercial complementary food contains added sugar and starch. Remember to check the nutrition fact labels carefully when you choose them.
- Home made complimentary food, made from fresh product will ensure that your baby receives a diverse and healthy diet.



## Promote a Good Eating Habit and Pleasant Environment

- Do not give up trying a specific food just because the baby refuses the first time, as this may cause faddy eating later.
- Provide a relaxing and encouraging eating environment for babies to accept different kinds of food.
- Don't give rice or cereals through bottles. Encourage babies to use spoons to eat and cups to drink from about 6 months.
- Let babies decide their amount of food intake. Do not force them to eat.
- Set up a daily mealtime routine. Let children learn to eat at the table and avoid chasing them around.



## Food Allergy

Watch out for allergic reactions to food such as skin rash. Stop giving the food at once if such condition occurs. May try again later.



## Dental Health

- Try not to add sugar or at most add a minimal quantity in weaning food.
- Do not use the bottle containing milk or other sweetened drinks as a pacifier.
- Avoid letting babies fall asleep while sucking the bottle or breastfeeding.
- Try not to use a bottle after 1 year old.

If you have any queries on weaning, please contact the medical and nursing staff of Maternal and Child Health Centres.

We are pleased to answer your enquires.

For more health information, please call the Department of Health's 24-hour health education hotline : 2833 0111 or visit the website of the Central Health Education Unit, Department of Health : [www.cheu.gov.hk](http://www.cheu.gov.hk)