

## Teaching your baby to eat

### Learning to eat

Once your baby is showing signs that they are ready for weaning, they can start learning how to eat their first solids.

Since their only experience of feeding so far has been from a breast or bottle, they only know how to suckle, so eating is a skill they will need to learn. This involves understanding how to move their mouth and accept food from a spoon. These early lessons in eating will help build up your baby's oral muscles. Not only will these be needed to manage bigger pieces of food later on, they will also be important for developing the muscles required for speech.

### Introduce textures gradually

Learning how to eat may seem like a challenge but a large part of it is about introducing different textures gradually. First, your baby will simply need to get used to the sensation of solid food and then learn how to move the food from the front to the back of their mouth before swallowing. That's why smooth textures such as porridge are best when your baby begins weaning, as they're easy to manage and digest.

### Adding a little more texture

Once your baby can manage smooth purées, the next step is to introduce foods with a little more texture. This will start teaching your baby how to chew, as they will need to move their jaws up and down to get the food ready for swallowing.

### Introducing small pieces

When your baby has mastered eating foods with a little more texture, they can move on to the third stage of weaning and more advanced chewing, with the introduction of small pieces and lumps.

### Toddler shapes and textures

By the time your baby reaches toddlerhood, they should be ready to chew on more toddler sized pieces and textures. At this stage, you may have to work a bit harder to keep them interested in their food. Fun shapes and variety will help keep them entertained as they become more independent and learn to feed themselves.

### Slowly introduce new tastes

Up until now, your baby has only known the taste of their usual milk, so learning to eat is also about gradually introducing your baby to new tastes. Babies have a natural preference for sweeter foods, so sweet flavours are easier for them to accept at the beginning. Ideal early weaning foods include puréed vegetables like carrot, swede, potato, parsnip, pumpkin, butternut squash and sweet potato; as well as puréed fruit such as pear, apple, apricot, banana and mango. Once they are happy with these, they will be ready for more adventurous flavours.

Since all taste preferences are learnt, it's important to introduce your baby to a wide variety of sweet and savoury foods early on.

If you'd like some more weaning tips, our feeding advisors are on hand to help. Call us on **08457 623 628**, between 8am and 8pm Monday to Friday, or use our confidential instant messaging service, Live Chat available from 9am to 5pm.