

Patient information

High energy weaning – a guide to increasing calories and protein in your baby's diet

The current guidelines from the Department of Health England recommend weaning from 6 months and onwards. In certain circumstances, it may be appropriate for your child to be weaned before these recommendations. This should only be agreed and supervised by your dietitian. Your child should never be weaned before 17 weeks of age. High energy weaning helps provide extra calories in your child's food to promote weight gain.

Weaning should not be delayed past 6 months of age as babies grow very quickly and require good sources of energy, as well as nutrients such as iron which are not provided in sufficient amounts by breast milk or formula. Biting, chewing and swallowing will also help your baby to develop the muscles that are needed for speech.

Your baby may already be on a high energy formula such as SMA High Energy®, Infatrini® or Similac High Energy®. This formula should be continued during weaning, and quantities should NOT be reduced as it is providing essential calories.

Signs your baby is ready to wean

Babies develop at different rates, and some babies will be ready to wean before others. There are three key signs which indicate your baby is ready for weaning:

1. They can stay in a sitting position and are able to hold their head steady
2. They can pick up food and put it in their mouths by themselves (this demonstrates hand / eye / mouth coordination).
3. They can swallow solids (this will take a little practice).

Chewing fists, waking in the night or wanting extra milk feeds are not signs of being ready to wean. These are just normal baby behaviours.

How to start weaning

- Aim to give one teaspoon at one mealtime and build this up to a few teaspoons over a few days.
- Start with one meal time per day and increase this to two meal times and then three after a few days or weeks, depending on how well your baby takes to weaning.
- Try to use a highchair which they can be strapped into.
- Initially, offer baby rice mixed with formula or breast milk.
- After a couple of days, move onto pureed fruit or vegetables.
- From 6 months, you can give mashed foods and finger foods.

Early stage weaning foods (from 17 weeks)

Until now, your baby will only have had milk and they will need to develop the skills needed to move food around their mouth and to swallow it.

First foods should be purees which are smooth and runny. To start, offer powdered baby rice mixed with breast milk or their usual formula. You can also offer purees made from well cooked vegetables, potatoes or stewed fruits all mixed with breast milk or formula to make them runny. Try offering one new fruit or vegetable per day.

Once your child is accepting a few spoons of these foods, start to add higher calorie foods into the puree. Butter, cream, avocado and full fat cream cheese are helpful foods and will add good sources of energy and calories but only need to be added in small amounts. Some foods are naturally higher in energy, such as potato, sweet potato, banana, avocado, lentils, beans, full fat natural yoghurt and dried fruits which have been soaked in water or milk and pureed.

Foods to avoid until your baby is 6 months old

However, some foods are best avoided until your baby is 6 months old. These include:

- Salt: do not add salt to any foods.
- Sugar: do not add sugar to any foods.

- Eggs should not be given under 6 months. They can be given after 6 months but should be lion-stamped and well cooked.
- Nuts and peanuts (unless you have been specifically told to give these by your dietitian). Whole nuts are a choking risk. Nut butters and ground nuts can be given from 6 months onwards.
- Meat and fish should not be given until 6 months.

These foods should not be given to your baby until they are one year old:

- Honey: This should not be given until one year old as it can cause botulism.
- Raw or lightly cooked shellfish should be avoided for babies due to the risk of food poisoning.
- Shark, swordfish or marlin should be avoided for the first year as they are high in mercury and can affect the development of your baby's nervous system.

These foods should be avoided for longer:

- Rice milk or rice drinks should not be given until four and a half years old: these contain arsenic.
- Whole or chopped nuts: These are a choking risk, avoid until the age of 5 years old.

How to add more calories to your baby's food

- Add ½ to 1 teaspoons of butter / cheese / cream or oil to 1 - 2 tablespoons of potatoes or vegetables.
- Add 1 teaspoon butter to savoury homemade baby meals or to half a jar of baby food.
- Add 1 teaspoon double cream to sweet homemade baby meals or half a jar of dessert.
- Try to use cheese sauces made with your baby's usual milk and cheese, and add to pasta, rice or vegetables.
- If they are having a high energy formula, use this to make up cereals, baby rice, milk puddings or dried baby food.
- If you are giving fruit puree, add 1 - 2 tablespoons double cream or full fat custard.

- Always use full fat products.
- After the first couple of weeks, try to offer 2 courses at each meal, even if they only eat a small amount. Give rice pudding, fruit and custard, fruit and yoghurt, or fruit and cream after each meal.

Recipes

Mashed banana with coconut cream

¼ banana
1 teaspoons coconut cream

Mash the banana and add the coconut cream. Serve straight away.

Mashed avocado

¼ avocado

Mash until smooth and serve

Sweet potato with cinnamon

1 sweet potato, peeled and cut into chunks
A generous pinch of ground cinnamon
2 - 3 tablespoons single cream or coconut cream

Boil the sweet potato until soft. Mash/puree with the cinnamon and add the coconut cream.

Peas, potato and mint

20g frozen peas
70g potato
10ml (2 teaspoons) coconut cream
2 - 3 mint leaves

Peel the potatoes and place in a pan of cold unsalted water. Bring to the boil and cook until tender. Drain potatoes and leave to one side. Cook peas in hot water for 2 minutes. Drain and mash the peas through a sieve to get rid of the skins. Add the pea puree and mint leaves to the potatoes and using a stick blender, blend until smooth. If the puree is a little thick, add a small amount of your baby's usual milk. Put into ice cube trays for portion control and/or freezing for use on another day.

Peaches, sultanas and baby rice

75g tinned peaches
15g sultanas
20g baby rice
10ml (2 teaspoons) single cream

Place the tinned peaches and sultanas in a pan and simmer on a low heat for 5 minutes. Add in 20g baby rice. Using a stick blender puree until smooth. Add the 2 teaspoons of cream and mix well. Put into ice cube trays for portion control and/or freezing for use on another day.

Weaning from 6 months of age

If you have started weaning earlier than 6 months, your baby will be ready to quickly move to soft mashed foods with a thicker consistency and some small, soft lumps. They may also be able to have soft finger foods.

If you are starting to wean at 6 months, you should start with runny purees but quickly move onto lumpier textures at around 7 months of age.

From 6 months, there is a wider range of foods which can be introduced to your baby which will provide necessary energy and minerals such as iron:

- * Meats which are minced or cooked until very soft, such as beef, chicken, pork and lamb.
- * Boneless fish and seafood, mashed or flaked.
- * Soft cooked rice, pasta, and noodles.
- * Bread, toast, chapatti, naan, pitta.
- * Weetabix®, Shreddies®, porridge and other cereals.
- * Lentils, beans and chickpeas, blended until smooth.
- * Eggs: can be soft cooked if stamped with the British Lion, otherwise well-cooked.
- * Nut or seed butters or pastes. No whole or chopped nuts before the age of five years old.
- * Full fat dairy such as cheese, yoghurt, fromage frais, custard, rice pudding. Milk in sauces or on cereal, but not as a main drink.
- * Butter, oils and oil-based spreads.

After a few weeks, each meal should have a carbohydrate, protein and a fruit or vegetable portion.

Adding extra energy to baby foods from 6 months

The latest advice on nuts encourages you to give your baby nuts from 6 months as long as there is no family history of nut allergies. Ensure they are finely ground or smooth nut butters to avoid choking.

- If you are using ready-made baby meals, add ½ teaspoon of smooth nut butter to each meal, including baby porridge.
- Add a teaspoon of smooth nut butters, coconut cream or plain cream cheese (full fat) or a small pinch of grated cheese to any savoury dishes.

From 7 - 8 months, start to increase the lumpiness of textures and offer finger foods as well as puree at mealtimes so babies can feed themselves. Let them play and get messy!

Recipes

White fish, kale, butternut and potato

15g white fish
 30g carrots
 60g kale
 35g butternut squash
 60g potato

Chop carrots, butternut, kale and fish. Add them to a pan along with the olive oil and cook on a low heat until soft. Take out a couple of pieces of carrot and fish to be used as finger foods during the meal. Mash or puree the rest. You can loosen the mixture a little if it is too thick by using a little full fat milk or cream.

Lentil and vegetables

½ small onion
 100g carrot
 15g celery
 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
 200g sweet potato
 400ml water

Fry the onion, carrot and celery in the oil for 5 minutes until softened. Add lentils and sweet potato and pour over the water. Bring to the boil, turn down the heat and simmer covered for 20 minutes. Puree with a stick blender.

Bolognese sauce

1 tablespoons olive oil
 1 small onion
 1 garlic clove
 1 carrot
 100g lean minced beef
 ½ tin tomatoes
 ½ teaspoons tomato puree

150ml unsalted chicken stock
2 tablespoons tiny pasta shapes

Fry the chopped onion, garlic, carrot for 5 minutes. Add the minced beef and brown for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in the tomatoes, tomato puree and chicken stock. Simmer for 15 minutes. Cook a little pasta, drain and mix with the sauce and puree.

Cheesy potato cakes

400g mashed potato (fortified with butter and whole milk)
40 - 50g of all-purpose flour
1 medium egg
75g grated cheese
50g feta cheese crumbled
3 spring onion
Handful of spinach

Mix all the ingredients in a bowl. Divide mixture into 8 portions, to form small cakes. Heat frying pan with a drizzle of oil and teaspoon of butter. Cook on a medium heat until golden brown and flip over, then puree or fork mash.

Chocolate and chia seed pudding

1 ripe banana
80 – 85mls coconut milk
2 tablespoons chia seeds
1 teaspoons of cocoa powder

Blend the banana and coconut milk together as if you were making a smoothie. Add the chia seeds and cocoa powder and blend for a few seconds, you can mix by hand if you prefer. Pour into serving jar and rest in the fridge for 20 - 30 minutes until mixture is custard like in texture. You could prepare this well in advance and keep refrigerated overnight.

Are vitamin supplements needed?

The Department of Health recommends that all babies, are given a daily supplement containing 8.5 to 10 micrograms of Vitamin D to protect their bone health. Infant formulas are fortified with added Vitamin D, so additional supplements are not required for formula fed babies unless they are consuming less than 500mls (17floz) of formula each day. Vitamin D supplements should be continued until at least 5 years of age.