

Leaflet for parents

Feeding: a child's perspective

She keeps shoving that spoon in my mouth. I'm going to spit it all out!

Blah! Blah! I'm not eating that muck!

I'll stop crying if she dips my dummy in the sugar.

Look at the lovely pattern I've made with my ketchup.

Why is Mum so upset I haven't eaten anything? I'm not hungry.

If I stick my fingers down my throat
Mum will come running!

If I make a fuss out shopping
she will give me some sweets.

YUCK! YUCK! LUMPS!
Does he expect me to
chew and swallow? I
wish I were still a baby

My brother still has Mummy's
milk and I'm stuck up here
on my own.



Feeding: a parent's perspective

The bottle doesn't seem enough anymore – he's a big baby for 10 weeks. I think I should put an extra scoop of milk in the bottle.

She screams if I don't give her a bottle, she just throws the beaker at me.

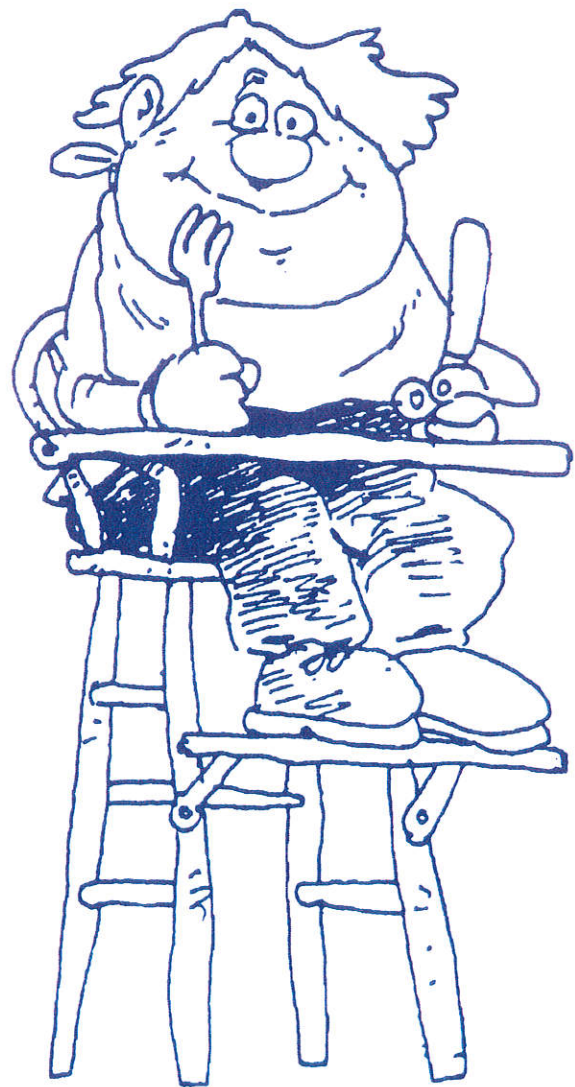
Every time I give him lumpy food he just gags, I don't know if I should go back to puréed food.

He keeps making himself sick and I panic in case he's going to choke.

If I give her the spoon she just makes a mess everywhere.

Nursery says he eats everything they give him, but at home he only eats chocolate biscuits and crisps.

I'm worried he's not eating enough healthy food.



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Let's wean!

Weaning is the name given to the change from relying solely on baby milk to introducing other foods to your baby. It is a very special time for both parents and child, and not only signals developments in your baby's brain but also a big shift in your relationship with your baby. When babies are small, we have to do everything for them, but as they grow they take many little steps towards independence.

Some parents may welcome their baby moving on from a total reliance on milk, but for others the transition might feel more difficult. It might feel like your baby doesn't need you so much and this could leave you with a mixture of feelings. Just like other big changes, there'll probably be some good days and some more difficult days. Your child will be experiencing new tastes and textures, and is likely to be a bit unsure about it at times. Weaning can sometimes leave you both feeling a bit 'lumpy', just like the new foods you will be introducing! Your health visitor appreciates this is an important time for the whole family and she would be willing to listen to any concerns you might have.

It can feel like there's a lot to think about

It is not unusual to feel anxious about the different aspects of weaning. You might worry that your baby will choke or gag, you might not know which foods to cook, or worry that you'll get this wrong somehow. You might be relieved that your partner will be able to play a more active role in your baby's mealtimes. You might feel that all your friends' babies are starting solids and can't understand why your baby doesn't seem interested. Weaning can seem like a point of pride for some parents, as if it's a pressure and a rush to have their babies on three family meals a day. However, if weaning is not taken at the babies' pace it may result in unhelpful attitudes to food later.

You might feel uncertain or confused about weaning but not really know why you feel this way. This might be a good time to talk to someone understanding, like a friend, family member or health visitor. Weaning can feel difficult because you want to hold on to your precious moments of closeness when you breast feed, or because you think this might be your last chance to be really close to your baby. You might be thinking about other changes which you are associating with weaning, such as being expected to go back to work or start leaving your baby with a child minder. You might feel OK about these changes but notice your baby

seems reluctant to be weaned, and so you might be worried whether you're doing the right thing or not. These are all common concerns that many parents can identify with. Whatever your concerns, it's very unlikely that you're the only parent whose ever had these thoughts, and talking about them to someone understanding might just help you find a way to move forward.

There is good news

The good news is that babies come with ways of telling you when they are ready for the next step and what they like. When your baby was first born you might have taken a while to figure out what she wanted and when, but you will have realised that even though she couldn't manage language she was still extremely good

at communicating – letting you know when she wanted her milk, when she needed to stop for a break, and also when she had had enough.

Over the last 4-6 months your baby's physical and thinking capabilities have improved so you might now be noticing some different behaviours, particularly related to mealtimes. She might be getting hungrier sooner in the day or waking more at night for food- or perhaps she is still not satisfied even when she has finished her milk. Also, her visual skills are vastly improved compared to those of a newborn. She is able to see the rest of the family eating and may signal that she would like to try some solid food herself by holding her hand out or trying to grab at food. Different babies will show different signs but some may appear very excited. Some may seem visually fixed on the adult food and some may become a little upset when none comes their way!



The fact that your baby can hold her head up when sat on your lap may also be a sign that she is physically more ready for the next stage towards her being able to feed herself. This may all be accompanied by your baby putting her hands into her mouth, feeling her own fingers and tongue. It is really important to 'listen' to your baby's communications and treat her as the individual that she is.

Weaning includes other people too

Eating is an everyday activity that we enjoy through the taste of nice foods and the social interaction that we have with others. Eating with your baby should be no different. Just like all your baby's experiences, mealtimes can also be fun learning opportunities marking an increase in your baby's skill and growing independence. He or she will really enjoy eating at mealtimes with you and the other members of the family, even if this requires a bit more patience from you; babies do like to grab at other food, make a mess and take their time when they are learning the new skills of weaning.

If we are presented with something we have not tried before we probably approach it in a curious manner, holding it in our mouths and experiencing the texture before swallowing it down. If your baby has always readily accepted milk previously, it can be hard not to feel rejected when she spits out these new tastes. Try to remember that your baby may need several chances at a new food before he can decide if he likes it or not. It can be even harder to be relaxed about weaning if you know she'll sleep better if she eats well, or you have been worried about her being poorly recently, or she seems to be spitting a lot out at the moment. Try to keep in your mind that your baby is good at communicating with you, and is asking you to read these signs even though she can't use words.

As you would expect with any important change, there might be times when your baby seems to be finding weaning a bit tricky. For example, your baby will be learning to wait for the next spoonful to be loaded. Your baby might try to go back to relying on bottles or using the breast as a comforter. He or she will need your help to keep going and not give up. It can feel easier just to give in and go back to milk, even though your baby is clearly giving you signals that they are ready for weaning. This is when another person, such as a friend, relative or health visitor, can help you to keep going in a way that is sensitive to your baby's signals.

Think about how you would want to be fed

The things that are important to us as adults at a mealtime are not that dissimilar to a baby's desires. We like to see our food in front of us. We need to be able to reach it and be in control of what we put in our mouth next. It's nice to eat alongside someone else. We like to be comfortable in order to feel relaxed and enjoy the experience and we like to have enough time so that it doesn't feel like a race towards indigestion! We also generally stop when we are full up.

However we have all had different experiences of mealtimes and it might be worth taking a moment to think about your own experience of food and eating. Would you think of yourself as someone who likes most things and is willing to try new tastes, or do you think your likes are limited. How do you think this might have a bearing on what you give to your baby or indeed how you present food to her? Remember the non-verbal cues we give can be more powerful than what we actually say so it's important to look positive about the food you offer – even if it's something you yourself aren't particularly fond of. Your baby's non-verbal cues are important and so look out for those gestures that mean she wants more or that she's had enough. These might be as simple as opening her mouth or looking towards you, turning her head away, clamping her lips together, or even blinking hard.

wow is this fun!
It tastes yummy and
I can get my hands
in it too!



Trying to see feeding time from your baby's perspective is an important step towards appreciating how she might be feeling in a given situation rather than sticking to your own agenda about how much you feel she should be eating at this particular sitting. Your baby will gain so much from knowing you are listening to what she is trying to tell you. Your recognition of her signs to indicate that she has had enough and wants to stop now builds a real sense of trust and understanding. She is more likely to enjoy future mealtimes if she feels she has some measure of control about what and how she eats.

can't you see
I've had enough now thanks mum.
You might want me to finish that last
mouthful but I just don't have
any room left

