

HOW TO ACHIEVE HEALTHY WEANING



When it comes to starting solids, you want to get your little one off to a healthy start with food, but why is 'healthy' weaning so important and what does it actually look like?

My Little Foodie take a holistic view. As well as providing healthy, balanced and age appropriate foods and meals, we think about other factors that contribute to an overall healthy weaning experience for you and your baby.

CHECK OUT SOME OF OUR HEALTHY WEANING INSIGHTS AND WISDOM...

Healthy start - The first 1000 days

The first 1000 days of a child's life, starting from conception up until they reach 2 years of age is now well recognised as a crucial window of opportunity to shape a child's growth and development. Nutrition during this period of time lays essential foundations, supporting a child's ability to grow, learn, develop and thrive. The transition to solids is a key part of a child's nutritional journey during this time, and has the ability to contribute both positively or negatively to a child's health and development.

Establishing your baby on a balanced, varied and appropriate diet which meets their unique nutritional needs can feel daunting - but knowledge is power. We provide you with information at each stage of weaning to support you with key foods and nutrients to consider, why they are important and how to build the balance for your baby's nutritional needs as you take each step through weaning.

Healthy attitude

Thinking about, starting and progressing through weaning can bring a whole array of emotions to the table for parents such as enthusiasm, optimism, fear, worry, anticipation, and excitement. Your emotions are affected by the experiences of others, comparison with your baby's peers, conflicting advice from friends, family or health professionals and the ever present sleep deprivation!

Adopting a healthy attitude towards weaning can empower and reassure you through the good and not-so-good days. Here's our top tips to remember:

- **Your baby is learning a whole new skill** - like any new skill, this takes time. Eating is perhaps one of the most complex skills we have to master as human beings, and it's not picked up overnight. Being patient in allowing your baby the opportunity, exposure and time to pick up this new skill will help take the pressure off. Remember, weaning involves lots of learning!
- **Each baby's journey will be different** - like any aspect of a child's development, such as walking or talking each baby moves at their own pace. Try to pay attention to your baby's own progress, rather than comparing with others, as this can lead to lots of worry or anxiety - emotions that often make mealtimes much more difficult. Focus on using credible information sources, and being positive in the approach you are taking, such as choosing spoon-led or baby-led. There is no right or wrong.
- **Anxiety is infectious** - understanding that your baby will quickly pick up on your emotional state (body language is a key way your baby understands communication) can be helpful to remember during weaning. If you're stressed, they will pick up on this. Anxious babies or children tend not to eat very well, as they move from a relaxed feeding state into a similar stress response, fight or flight. Even if those butterflies are going wild in your stomach, try to pop a positive face on, take some deep breaths, smile and enjoy the mealtime.



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Healthy food

A cornerstone of healthy weaning is of course healthy food. Our weaning guidance at each stage takes you through considerations about building balanced healthy meals and exposure to different nutrients or food groups for your baby. Our other top tips for healthy foods when weaning are:

- **Focus on fresh ingredients** - home prepared meals from fresh foods and ingredients are likely to be much more nutrient dense, and offer a varied nutritional profile than commercial baby foods. Using fresh ingredients also means variety with flavours and textures are much easier to achieve, a key aspect to consider when weaning
- Offer a variety of foods - offering variety with foods is hugely important during the weaning window. A varied diet supports a baby to establish a broad palate and ensure a wide range of nutrients or foods are provided for health and development, brain development, preventing nutritional deficiency, gut health and allergy prevention
- Cook balanced meals - Babies need balanced meals that combine key nutrients such as iron, Vitamin C and energy providing foods
- Avoid certain foods - avoid foods with added salt or high salt foods, foods with added sugars, heavily processed foods high in fat and/or sugar, honey, raw shellfish and others. A full list can be found here: www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/safe-weaning/

Healthy food relationships & habits

Alongside the nutritional side of healthy weaning, you want to ensure your little one develops a healthy relationship with food. This feels ever more important in a society where there is a huge amount of noise about food, dieting, good vs bad foods and misinformation. Establishing a healthy relationship with food can definitely start early, here are some top tips to consider:

Respect their self-regulation (hungry vs full)

- most babies are intuitively excellent at self

regulation when it comes to feeding and food. This means they will generally eat to appetite, and follow their body's internal hunger and fullness cues. As adults, who are able to override these signals more easily, it can be easier to fall into habits of presuming children have or haven't 'had enough'. Try to avoid falling prey to your own expectations of how much your baby should eat and let them lead. Check out our guide on hunger and fullness cues here [\[web link to PDF\]](#)

Food doesn't have earning potential - food is just food. One food does not earn another and likewise eating foods or certain foods should not be associated with a reward or punishment association for children. As your baby progresses through weaning, continue to keep food neutrality

Top up trouble - it's very easy to fall into the habit of offering preferred foods or easier foods for your baby to manage if you feel like your little one has had a 'bad' meal. Unfortunately, this can lead a baby to associating refusal of certain meals or foods, with top ups of preferred foods. Overall this can cause babies to narrow the range of foods they accept and/or be a huge source of parental feeding stress.

Eating together - the focus on family meals is a favourite weaning tip for a reason. Babies and young children have the ability to learn a huge amount about food and mealtimes but being surrounded by others eating, having exposure to new or less familiar foods and opportunities to learn by modelling. Mealtimes are also an opportunity for your baby to learn other skills like communication, and feel close to parents, siblings and peers through a shared activity.

Language - whilst your baby won't be proficient with language comprehension during their first weeks and months with food, overtime they will become much more aware of language and emotions being attributed to food by communication. If you find you're referring to foods as 'good vs 'bad' or using big emotions or phrases when describing food e.g. 'disgusting' vs 'delicious' be aware that over time your little one might start picking up on these too. Language and emotions around food do have potential to impact eating habits of young children and toddlers. Keeping language around food neutral, and establishing habits with this can support your child's relationship with food and mealtimes as they grow and understand more and more.