

Handout for carers and adoptive 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



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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.

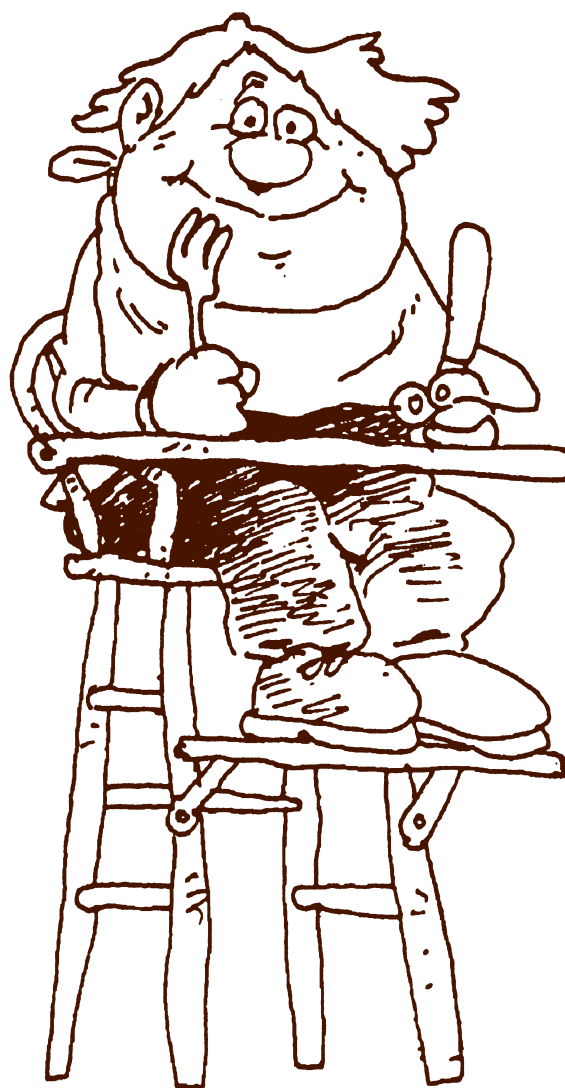
Every time I give him lumpy food he just gags, I don't know if I should go back to puréed food.

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.



Handout for carers and adoptive parents Introducing solid food and feeding

Introducing solid food

Introducing solid foods (or weaning) is the name given to the change from the baby drinking only baby milk to introducing other foods. It can be a very special time and not only signals a change in a baby's physical and brain development but also a big shift in the development of your relationship with the baby. When babies are small, we have to do everything for them, but as they grow they take many little steps towards independence.

Some carers 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 the 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 baby will be experiencing new tastes and textures, and is likely to be a bit unsure about it at times. Introducing solid food 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 and provide you with information about how to wean your baby.

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

It is not unusual to feel anxious about the different aspects of introducing solid food. You may feel that you're just getting to know your baby and you may be unsure if your baby is ready to start introducing solid food. 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 feel that all your friends' babies are starting solids and can't understand why your baby doesn't seem interested. Introducing solid food can be seen as a pressure and a rush to have babies on three family meals a day. However, if introducing solid food is not taken at the baby's pace it may result in unhelpful attitudes to food later.

You might feel uncertain or confused about introducing solid food. This might be a good time to talk to someone understanding, like a friend, family member or health visitor. 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 carers or adoptive parents can identify with. Whatever your concerns, it's very unlikely that you're the only one who has ever had these thoughts, and talking about them to someone understanding might help you find a way to move forward.

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There is good news

The good news is that as you get to know your baby more you will see that she has ways of telling you when she is ready for the next step and what she likes and dislikes. It can sometimes take a while to figure out what she wants and when. But you will see that even though she cannot speak she has ways of communicating with you and letting you know when she wants milk, when she needs to stop for a break and also when she has had enough.

During the first 6 months the baby's physical and thinking capabilities have improved so you might be noticing 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 he/she would like to try some solid food by holding out her hand and trying to grab food. Different babies will show different signs but some may appear very excited. Some may seem visually fixated on the adult's food and some may become a little upset when none comes their way.

mmm ... that's what I ... needed zzz



The fact that your baby can hold her head up when sitting on your lap may also be a sign that she is physically more ready for the next stage towards 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.

Introducing solid food includes other people too

Eating is an everyday activity that we enjoy through the taste of nice foods and the social interactions that we have with others. Eating with your baby can help them learn about how they can enjoy food socially, something they may not have had an opportunity to do before. Just like all your baby's experiences, mealtimes can also be fun learning making an increase in your baby's skill and growing independence. She can really enjoy eating at mealtimes with you and other members of the family, even if this requires a bit more patience from you. Babies can grab food, make a mess and take their time when they are learning a new skill.

If we are presented with something we have not tried before we probably approach it in a curious or cautious manner, babies may do this by holding new foods in their mouths and experiencing the taste and texture before swallowing it or perhaps spitting it out. Try to remember that your baby may need several experiences of a new food before they can decide if they like it or not. It can be

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even harder to relax about introducing solid food if you think that she may sleep better if she eats well or you have been worried about her being poorly recently, or she seems to be spitting a lot of food 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 and your baby get to know each other these signs will become clearer and this will help you feel more confident about what the signs are saying.

As you would expect with any important change, there might be times when your baby seems to be finding introducing solid food 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 as a comforter. When you are first introducing solid food you may need to think about whether this is a sign that your baby is not yet ready to wean or your baby needs a few more chances to become more familiar with this new step in their feeding. This is when another person such as a friend, relative or health visitor can help you to think about what is right for your baby so that you're able to keep going in a way that is sensitive to your baby's signals.

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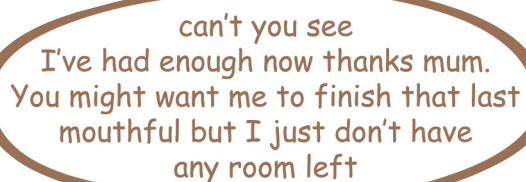
Think about how you would want to be fed

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. At times it can be 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.

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

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 him? Remember the non-verbal cues we can give can be more powerful than what we actually say so it's important to look positive about food you offer – even if it is 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.

Trying to see feeding 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 time. 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 up 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



Introducing solid foods (weaning) information is available on the NHS Choices website at:

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/solid-foods-introducing-solid-food.aspx>

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Useful ideas for mealtimes

Here are some useful ideas to think about when it comes to mealtimes.

Tips for toddlers

Eating together regularly as a family can offer the child an enjoyable social experience. This often begins as the baby starts to take solid food and continues as they grow and join the family in eating 'family food'. For some children learning that food can be an enjoyable social experience may take longer than others. You may need to think about the different ways you can help the child understand what it feels like to eat with others and enjoy the experience. It can take time and they may not understand it first time.

As the child is testing out ways of experiencing food he might want to put his hands in their food. Sometimes the way they act can seem messy or seem stressful for adults. Many of these behaviours that young children show can be examples of a natural stage in a child's development. Some children may not have had an opportunity to experience these steps in their development or the experience might have been different to what would be thought of as helpful. Depending on a child's experience some stages such as the messy stage may go on for longer especially if a child has not been able to see or be guided to the next step. You can help the child by helping them to put into words how a food might feel. If they put their fingers in yoghurt you might say 'Does it feel sticky and feel nice'. Later when you think they are ready to use a spoon, you could give the child a spoon and you might say something like 'Look at your yoghurt, it sticks on your spoon. Can you put it in your mouth? Does it taste nice?'

There may be other behaviours around food that the child might think are 'normal' and they may not realise there is another way to be around food. By gently showing them how the family eats together as a shared experience they can start to change what they understand about food and learn that eating together can be fun.

Toddlers are also going through a time of change with their food as they start to notice the colour, amount, new taste or how it makes people react. Their feeding patterns may also change from when they were a baby. Babies often settle into a regular pattern where they eat roughly the same each day (although things such as illness that can affect this). As they become toddlers they can eat more solid food that has more calories packed into a smaller amount. They also do not necessarily need to eat the same amount each day so they might eat a lot one day and less another. But if you watch what they ate over a week it would

probably add up to what they need. They will also have times when they are growing more and at these times their appetite can increase to match how much food they need to grow.

Here are some helpful ideas that can help the child learn to enjoy the experience food and social eating.

- Toddlers like adults are affected by how food looks so you might find that using colourful or patterned plastic plates and cups of contrasting colours is appealing especially if they have a favourite colour or picture. It may help to keep the child's interest in what they are eating.
- As adults most of us have become used to thinking that we must eat three meals a day and while this is a reasonable idea for adults, children may need extra snacks or small meals when they are hungry especially when they are having a growth spurt.
- Children can take different times to eat their food, some eat it quickly and others can take much longer. You will get to know how long the child takes to eat certain foods and this may be different in particular situations. However you may occasionally need to think about the signs the child is giving you when he is tired, not very hungry, uninterested or bored. In these situations you may find it helpful to think about when it is best to finish the mealtime. The child may later become hungry or more interested in food and you can either give him the rest of the meal or a snack that you think is suitable.
- It can be very helpful to offer encouragement and to praise the child when they have eaten their food, even if a small amount is eaten and not to make a fuss if a small amount of food is left. The child may be full up or just had enough of a particular food.
- Children naturally prefer sweet foods and biscuits and sweets can be very appealing to children however, it is healthier to offer snacks such as fruit or bread sticks. That is not to say children should never be given biscuits or sweets but it is better to avoid filling up on biscuits and sweets as snacks especially before a meal.
- If you are going to give sweets, dentists advise that they are given at the end of a meal so that the number of times the child's teeth are exposure to sugar is kept to a minimum. You just need to avoid using the sweets as an incentive to try to get the child to eat their main meal because children can very quickly see the sweets as the 'good' food and the main meal as the 'bad' food. To develop a healthy attitude towards food it is best for us not to see food as good or bad but just part of our normal daily life.

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