

## Weaning Policy

Most children are developmentally ready to begin weaning (the addition of solid foods alongside milk) at around six months of age. After about six months of age, additional foods are needed to complement the nutrients in milk, and to introduce infants to a range of tastes and textures, as they start their food journey.

When providing food for infants, it is important that nursery settings work closely with families to ensure a consistent approach in food provision both at nursery and at home. At Walmer Bridge Day Nursery, we always follow the parent(s)/carer(s) lead during the weaning process.

There are 3 clear signs, which, when they appear together from around 6 months of age, show that a baby is ready for their first solid foods, alongside milk.

Signs a baby may be ready to start weaning:

- Ability to stay in a sitting position unaided and hold their head steady.
- Ability to co-ordinate their eyes, hands, and mouth, so they can look at their food, pick it up and put it in their mouth.
- Ability to swallow food (rather than spit it back out).

It is important to wait until a baby is around six months of age before beginning the weaning process. Reasons for this include:

- A baby's digestive system needs to mature enough to tolerate solid foods.
- A baby needs to have lost their 'tongue-thrust' reflex (a reflex which means they instinctively push out anything on their tongue, to protect against choking).
- A baby needs to have mastered new tongue skills, including how to push food from the front of their mouth to the back, and then swallow.
- A baby needs to be able to sit up unaided.
- A baby needs to be able to pick up food and move it to their mouth.
- Milk is enough. Research shows that babies can get all their nutritional needs from breast milk or formula milk for the first 6 months of their life.

## First foods

Infants' first foods can include a range of foods from the different food groups, and can be provided blended, mashed or as a 'finger food'. A few examples of first foods:

- soft cooked vegetables such as parsnip, butternut squash, carrot, broccoli, cauliflower
- fruit (soft, or cooked without adding sugar) such as apple, pear, peach, melon, banana
- dairy products made from whole milk, such as yoghurt, fromage frais, custard
- meat such as chicken
- fish without bones such as tinned tuna
- starchy foods such as potato, sweet potato, pasta, noodles, rice
- hard-boiled eggs
- pulses such as peas, beans, and lentils

It is important to introduce and offer vegetables that aren't so sweet, such as broccoli, cauliflower, and spinach. This will help a baby get used to a range of flavours (rather than just the sweeter ones like carrots and sweet potato) and can help prevent them being fussy eaters as they grow up. Remember, babies do not need any salt or sugar added to their food. Babies should NOT eat salty foods, as it can cause serious damage to their kidneys, and excess sugar can cause tooth decay.

More information regarding choosing first foods is available on Start4life website\*.

## **Adult-led weaning**

When beginning weaning, babies only need a small amount of solid food, once a day (usually mid-day). It is advised that weaning starts with single fruits and vegetables. To create a puree, fruits and vegetables should be cooked until soft and then blended – in a large plastic jug or bowl, using the hand-blender. This equipment is located in the main kitchen. Boiled water or whole milk can be added to create a looser and smoother texture. Staff should gradually transition to mashing foods (using a potato masher or fork), rather than blending. Offering lumpier textures should be a gradual process and only be done once the baby is developmentally ready and is a more confident eater. Babies take different amounts of time to get used to lumps, but it's an important skill they need to learn. Managing lumpier foods helps babies to learn how to chew, move solid food around their mouth and swallow solid foods. Once weaning is more established, staff can offer menu meals to babies (blended or mashed) e.g. mashed lasagne. When spoon-feeding babies, staff should also provide the baby with a spoon to encourage them to try feeding themselves. By about 7-9 months, infants should be offered three meals a day (breakfast, lunch and tea), in addition to their milk feeds. Between around 9-12 months, infants will gradually eat more solid foods and require less milk feeds.

## **Baby-led weaning**

Baby-led weaning means that a baby is only offered finger foods right from the start of the weaning process and letting them feed themselves, rather than an adult spoon-feeding them pureed or mashed foods. Baby led weaning promotes independence - babies love feeding themselves. It also promotes fine motor skill development and hand-eye co-ordination. Baby-led weaning allows babies to learn how to chew first, then swallow.

When beginning baby-led weaning, the food's texture should be soft enough to 'smush' with your fingers, so that babies are able to easily gum chew it. Initially, staff should steer clear of foods that are hard or crunchy, like raw carrot or apple slices. As weaning becomes more established, staff may wish to offer a wider range of different foods such as cooked pieces of whole penne pasta, cooked potato sticks, breadsticks, rice cakes, and toast.

Staff should ensure that babies are always supervised during baby-led weaning. "Whilst eating, children must be within sight and hearing of a member of staff", as per the Statutory Framework for Early Years. At Walmer Bridge Day Nursery, we always follow the parent(s)/carer(s) lead during the weaning process – we will only use baby-led weaning if this is requested by parents. Some parents prefer baby-led weaning to traditional adult-led spoon feeding, while others combine a bit of both.

## **Finger foods**

Finger foods help babies to get used to different food textures. Finger foods promote and encourage self-feeding and independence. Finger foods such as soft fruit and vegetables, should always be sliced into thick strips or sticks, so that babies can hold them in their fist and chew from the top downwards. Finger foods help babies to learn to bite off, chew and swallow pieces of food. Staff should NOT cut food up into tiny bite-sized pieces, as this could pose a choking risk.

## **Allergens**

It's important to introduce allergen foods one at a time, and in very small amounts, so that any potential allergic reactions can be identified. See the allergy policy for more information regarding allergens. Allergen foods should be introduced from around 6 months as part of a baby's diet, just like all other foods. Once an allergen food has been introduced and is tolerated, it should be continually offered as part of that baby's usual diet (to minimise the risk of allergy). If a staff member thinks that a baby has a food allergy, the manager should be notified immediately – the manager and baby's key person will address their concerns to the baby's parent(s)/carer(s).

## Drinks

“Fresh drinking water must always be available and accessible to children”, as per the Statutory Framework for Early Years. Staff should encourage babies to take sips of water from a free-flow cup. Using a free-flow cup without a valve, will help babies to learn to sip and is better for their teeth. For babies under 6 months, drinking water should be sterilised by boiling the water first and then letting it cool right down.

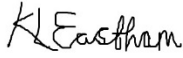

Babies should NOT be offered sweet drinks like squash, fizzy drinks, milkshakes, or fruit juice. These types of drinks can contain high levels of sugar, therefore should be avoided to help prevent tooth decay and child obesity. Cows' milk is not a suitable drink until a baby is 12 months old, but it can be used in cooking or mixed with food from 6 months of age.

## Preparation, storage and heating

Once prepared, fruit and vegetable purees can be stored in the kitchen fridge but must be used within 2 days. If unused after this time, the food should be disposed of. Purees can also be frozen to use at a later date. Staff should follow food safety procedures when cooling, freezing, and re-heating foods. Purees should be allowed to cool down before placing into the freezer. Purees should be frozen in suitable sealed plastic container or ice cube trays. Containers should be thoroughly cleaned and sterilised before use. Staff should use a sterile spoon to place the puree directly into the container or sections of the ice cube tray. If using an ice cube tray, it should be covered with plastic wrap before being placed into the freezer, to reduce the risk of freezer burn to the food. Food should never be frozen in glass containers. Once the cubes or ‘moulds’ are solidly frozen, they can be popped out and stored in plastic freezer bags. Frozen food must be labelled with the contents and date it was frozen. This allows staff to use it before it expires. Fruit and vegetable purees can be frozen for up to 6 months. Meat, poultry, and all other homemade baby food ‘meals’ can be frozen for up to 1 month. If unused after this time, the food should be disposed of.

Frozen baby food should be transferred to the fridge to defrost thoroughly. Microwaves should NOT be used to defrost food. When using a microwave to heat food, staff should be aware of potential ‘hot spots’ that can pose a burning risk to the baby’s mouth. To reduce this risk, staff should remove and stir the food regularly to remove any hot spots. Staff should always ensure that any cooked or re-heated food has cooled down to a safe temperature before offering it to a baby. Staff should never reheat or re-freeze baby food more than once – any unused food after thawing and heating should be disposed of.

[\\*https://www.nhs.uk/start-for-life/baby/weaning/what-to-feed-your-baby/from-around-6-months/](https://www.nhs.uk/start-for-life/baby/weaning/what-to-feed-your-baby/from-around-6-months/)

This policy was adopted on	Signed on behalf of the nursery	Date for review
8 <sup>th</sup> January 2024	Katy-Leigh Eastham (Nursery Manager) 	January 2025
This policy was reviewed on	Signed on behalf of the nursery	Changes made?
11 <sup>th</sup> March 2025	Katy-Leigh Eastham (Nursery Manager) 	No changes needed  March 2026