

The Weaning Companion



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INTRODUCTION

Why Weaning Matters and How we Support Families

Weaning is about so much more than food. It's about trust, connection, and those first little steps toward independence—one spoonful (and floor drop) at a time.

I'm Claire, founder of Unique Births, parent educator, and mum of six. I've tried just about every approach to weaning from spoon-feeding to baby-led, and the in-between muddles that real life brings. I know it can feel confusing, messy, and even a bit nerve-wracking.

That's why I created Fun with Food—a Workshop and eBook designed to help you feel calm, confident, and informed. So many parents tell me they don't know where to start, worry about getting it wrong, or feel overwhelmed by mixed messages. This course is here to cut through all that.

You won't find rigid rules or pressure to do things a certain way, just evidence-based guidance, a few laughs, and plenty of practical support. Whether you're doing puree, finger foods, or both, I'm here to help you tune into your baby, trust your instincts, and enjoy the journey. Because you're already doing better than you think, let's make weaning simple, supported, and truly your own.



CHAPTER ONE

What is weaning?

Welcoming your baby to the world of solid foods is an exciting step—one that's full of discovery, delight, and (yes) a bit of mess.... But what exactly is weaning?

Weaning is the process of gradually introducing your baby to solid foods while continuing to offer breast milk or infant formula. It's the journey from milk only feeds to sharing family meals, helping your baby learn how to eat, explore new flavours and textures, and develop independence at the table.

This stage is about so much more than nutrition. It's about sitting together, watching your baby discover tastes and textures, and creating early experiences of shared mealtimes that build trust and confidence.



Food is more than fuel- its a way we build trust, joy, and connection.

When to start?

Your baby's nutritional needs begin to change around 6 months. While milk continues to be their main source of nourishment for a while, solids offer important nutrients like iron and zinc that support growth and development.

Weaning also helps develop essential skills like chewing and swallowing, as well as fine motor coordination. It supports independence, encourages curiosity, and lays the foundations for a positive lifelong relationship with food.



This early stage isn't about eating large amounts—it's about learning through play, exploration, and being part of the family table.

Every baby is unique—starting solids isn't a race, it's a response. Trust your baby's timing, not the calendar.

When to start? cont...

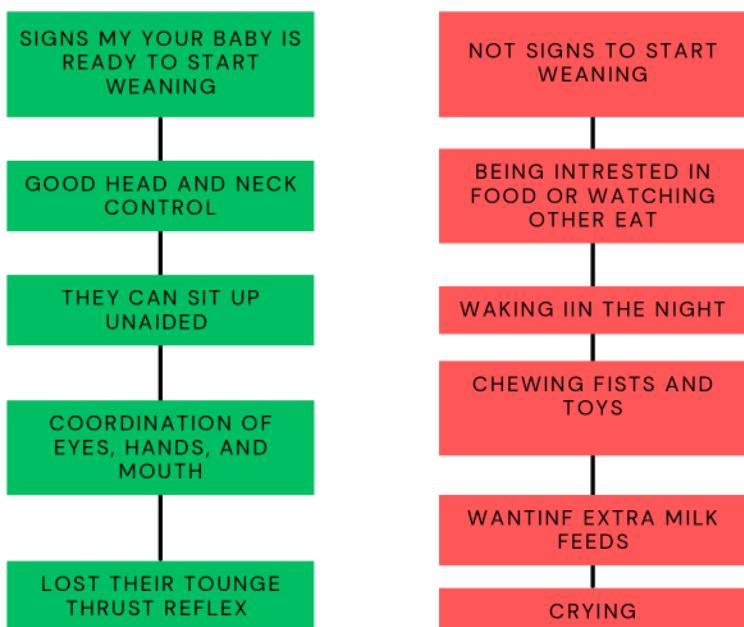
Every baby is unique, but the NHS recommends starting solids at around 6 months. The guidance is based on robust health evidence, as well as the physical development that typically occurs around this age.

As Amy Brown explains in 'Why Starting Solids Matters', beginning weaning at 6 months is about more than just nutritional timing—it's about developmental readiness, both inside and out. A baby at six months is not only better able to digest food, but also more physically able to participate in mealtimes.

They are more likely to enjoy the process and to explore food with confidence.

Look out for these key signs of readiness:

- Your baby can sit up well with minimal support and has good head control.
- They coordinate their eyes, hands, and mouth—able to look at food, pick it up, and bring it to their mouth.
- They can swallow food, rather than pushing it back out with their tongue reflexively.



If you're ever unsure whether your baby is ready, speak to your health visitor or GP—they can help guide you through it.

Why not earlier?

In previous generations, it was common to start weaning at 3 or 4 months, and many well-meaning relatives may still suggest this. But current evidence tells us that early introduction of solids—before around 17 weeks—can increase the risk of infections, reduce the amount of breastmilk or formula a baby receives (which is still their main source of nutrition at this age), and may contribute to problems with digestion.

Babies under 6 months also often lack the motor skills needed to sit upright and safely manage food in their mouths, which increases the risk of choking or food aversion. Internally, their digestive systems are still developing, which means introducing solids too early may place unnecessary strain on their gut.

According to research, delaying solids until developmental readiness improves acceptance of different foods, reduces fussiness later on, and aligns with long-term health outcomes such as reduced risk of obesity and allergies.



Handling Early Advice from Others

If someone suggests starting early—perhaps because "it worked for them"—it can be helpful to respond gently but firmly. You might say: "Thank you for sharing your experience. Guidance has changed quite a lot based on newer research. We're waiting until they're developmentally ready, which is usually around 6 months."

This approach validates their intention while standing firm in your choice.

CHAPTER TWO

Different Approaches to Weaning

What's Right for You and Your Baby?

When it comes to introducing solids, there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. What matters most is what feels safe, responsive, and comfortable for your baby and your family.

Next we will look into three popular methods, with research-backed insights on what they may offer and what to consider.



Traditional Weaning (Spoon-Feeding Purées)

You begin with smooth purées, gradually introducing thicker textures and soft finger foods.

Pros:

- Easier to monitor how much baby eats.
- Suitable if your baby has nutritional needs or you prefer structured feeding.
- Helpful for late pitchers, pre-term babies, or those who struggle with independent feeding.

Things to Consider:

- Can be more time-intensive.
- Risk of overfeeding if satiety cues are missed.
- May delay development of biting and chewing skills.

Baby-Led Weaning (BLW)

Baby takes soft finger foods and self-feeds from the start, skipping spoon-fed purées.

Pros:

- Supports motor skill development and independence.
- Encourages baby to regulate appetite, respecting hunger/fullness cues.
- Encourages tasting family meals and exploring varied textures early on.

Things to Consider:

- Messy—which is okay!
- Gagging is common; choking risk is low when proper safety is followed.
- Harder to track intake precisely.
- Iron-rich foods can require more careful preparation.

Combination Feeding

A middle-ground approach: some spoon-feeding alongside opportunities to self-feed finger foods.

Pros:

- Offers flexibility and gradual adaptation to textures.
- Supports skill development while reducing parental anxiety.
- Can balance nutritional intake and independence.

Things to Consider:

- Still requires attention to baby-led cues.
- Slightly more preparation (both purées and finger foods).
- Watch for confusion if approach shifts too abruptly.



What Will Work For You?

Approach	Highlights	Things to Consider
Spoon fed	Structured, measurable intake.	Potential overfeeding, delayed oral skills.
BLW	Self-fed, autonomy, texture exploration.	Messy, tricky to know how much has been eaten.
Combination	Flexible, responsive, skill-building.	May require more food preparation.



Top Tip: Explore What Fits You Best

Try this small experiment for a week:

- Pick one segment of day (e.g., lunchtime) and offer both a spoon-fed purée and a soft finger-food (like cooked carrot).
- Allow baby to show preference: let them self-feed or take the spoon.
- Observe cues of interest, fullness, or ease.
- Use journaling to note what felt calm, what baby seemed to enjoy, and how you felt doing it.

This real-life test often reveals which style feels more intuitive and joyful for both of you.

Equipment Checklist

What You Need and What You Really Don't

When you begin weaning, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by gadgets, trays, and promises of "must-haves." But introducing solids doesn't need to be expensive or complicated. Here's your honest guide to what's truly helpful—and what can usually stay on the shelf.



What you actually need

Highchair

A supportive highchair with a footrest and upright posture helps your baby sit safely during meals. Look for:

- A 90-degree angle at hips, knees, and ankles
- A five-point harness
- A removable tray or the ability to pull up to the table

Soft-Tipped Spoons or Pre-Spoons

Ideal for the early weeks if offering purées or mashed foods. Silicone-tipped spoons are gentle on gums.

Small Open Cup or Free-Flow Beaker

Babies can start learning to sip water from an open cup from around 6 months.

Bibs

Catch-all bibs with crumb catchers save on washing but Fabric bibs can be useful for comfort or travel.

Mess Mats or Floor Coverings

Not essential—but helpful if you're anxious about floor mess. A shower curtain or oilcloth can work just as well as pricier branded mats.

Bowls and Plates with Suction (Optional)

Useful once babies start scooping independently. Before then, food can be offered directly on the highchair tray.

Patience, towels, and humour!

Feeding is messy, unpredictable, and beautiful. Nothing replaces your calm, curious presence at the table.



What You Really Don't Need

✖ Baby Food Makers / Blenders

If you're making purées, a regular stick blender or fork works just fine. These machines are bulky and rarely used beyond a few weeks.

✖ Food Warmers / Bottle Warmers

Most babies happily take room-temp food. Unless you have specific needs, these can gather dust.

✖ Sectioned Plates with Compartments

While helpful for toddlers with preferences, they can overwhelm some babies. Keep it simple to start.

✖ Fancy Food Shapers or Presses

Fun but unnecessary. Babies learn best with whole, simple food in recognisable forms.

✖ Weaning Books of 200+ Recipes

One or two go-to recipe sources is plenty. Your baby's meals don't need to be different from yours—they just need to be soft, simple, and safe.

Top Tip: Try Before You Buy

Borrow items from friends, shop second-hand, or wait to see if your baby likes certain things (like open cups or suction plates). Most “weaning gear” is only used for a few months.

Gagging & Choking

What's the Difference?



Gagging – A Normal, Protective Reflex

Gagging is your baby's way of learning how much food they can safely manage. It's a built-in safety mechanism that helps move food forward in the mouth to avoid choking.

What it looks like:

- Baby goes red in the face
- Coughing or retching sounds
- Tongue thrusting or pushing food forward
- Watery eyes or slight upset
- Often happens with new textures or large pieces

What to do:

- Stay calm and supportive
- Let baby work it out—don't interfere unless they seem distressed
- Offer a sip of water afterward and a smile of reassurance

Babies' gag reflex is much further forward than adults'—it naturally moves back as they gain oral control.

Top Tips for Safer Eating

- Always supervise meals closely – no distractions
- Sit baby upright in a supportive highchair (90° hips, knees, and ankles)
- Avoid risky foods: whole grapes, raw apple slices, nuts, popcorn, sausages
- Learn baby first aid – it helps you stay calm and ready
- Start with soft, manageable pieces (banana fingers, steamed veg, well-cooked pasta)



Choking – A Medical Emergency

Choking is when the airway is partially or completely blocked, and the baby cannot breathe properly.

What it looks like:

- Baby is silent or unable to cough
- Turning blue or pale
- Panicked, wide eyes
- No sound or very weak attempts to cough
- May appear limp or distressed

What to do:

- Act fast – call 999 if needed
- Begin first aid if trained: back blows followed by chest thrusts.
- Stay with your baby and seek medical help even after recovery.

Choking is rare when babies are allowed to self-feed safe shapes and sizes of food and are seated upright with supervision.

Explore With Confidence

It's natural to feel worried. But knowing what's normal and what's not gives you power. Gagging is part of learning. With your support, your baby is developing lifelong skills for safe, happy eating.

Top tip

When your baby starts solids, it's completely normal to feel nervous—especially when you see them cough, sputter, or go red in the face. The good news? Most of what we see in the early days is gagging, not choking. Understanding the difference can help you feel more confident, calm, and prepared.

Top Tips for Safer Eating

- Always supervise meals closely – no distractions.
- Sit baby upright in a supportive highchair (90° hips, knees, and ankles).
- Avoid risky foods: whole grapes, raw apple slices, nuts, popcorn, sausages.
- Learn baby first aid – it helps you stay calm and ready.
- Start with soft, manageable pieces (banana fingers, steamed veg, well-cooked pasta).



Building Healthy Habits

Weaning is more than just introducing food—it's about laying the foundation for your baby's long-term relationship with eating. Healthy eating habits begin early, and this stage is a powerful opportunity to support your child's future well-being.

What Are Healthy Eating Habits?

- Trusting their appetite: Let your baby decide how much to eat. Appetite varies day-to-day.
- Exploring without pressure: Babies learn through messy play—squishing, smelling, licking and spitting out are all valid steps.
- Family connection: Eating with your baby, even if they're not eating much, encourages social learning.
- Repeated exposure: It can take 10–15 tries for a baby to accept a new food.
- No shame or praise: Avoid labelling food as "good" or "bad"—just model enjoyment and variety.



Routine and Rhythm

Creating gentle structure around meals helps babies feel secure. Aim for 3 meals a day and 1–2 snacks by the time your baby is one, but don't rush there. In the early stages, simply sit down together once or twice a day and offer small tastes.

Top Tip

Sit together and eat at the same time whenever possible.
Babies learn by watching you.

Following Your Baby's Lead

You are your baby's guide—not their boss at the dinner table. Instead of controlling what or how much your baby eats, focus on creating a safe space where they can explore food at their own pace. This means tuning in to their cues—offering when they show interest, pausing when they turn away, and respecting their yes or no.

Avoid turning food into a bargaining tool—like saying “you must eat this before you get pudding.” This can teach children to see certain foods (like vegetables) as chores, and sweet foods as rewards.

Try this instead: Offer pudding whether or not they eat everything, and serve all parts of the meal without a hierarchy. Over time, this builds trust and removes pressure.

Modelling Enjoyment

Babies learn by copying you. If you want your baby to eat vegetables, let them see you enjoy them. Talk positively about food, make sounds, smile. You're teaching them that food is a joyful part of life.

Making Mealtimes Enjoyable

- Keep it relaxed: Turn off distractions, and avoid rushing.
- Let go of perfection: Some days are chaotic—that's okay.
- Follow their mood: If they're too tired or unwell, it's okay to skip a meal.

Healthy habits are built over time, not in one sitting. Your role is to offer, invite, and support. Your baby's role is to decide what and how much to eat. Together, you're building lifelong skills.

Top Tip

Think of meals as a chance for your baby to learn—not just eat. What they touch, smell, and squish matters just as much as what they swallow.





Date: _____

Adventures ahead...

Daily reflection

Time of Meal:

Meal offered:

What did your baby do today?

Your mood before eating:

What did I notice about my baby's cues?

My baby's mood before eating:

What went well/What felt hard?

What small change could I try tomorrow to make mealtimes feel more enjoyable?

Thank you

Thank you so much for attending our Fun with Food workshop. We hope you left feeling encouraged, confident, and better equipped to support your little one's weaning journey.

We've created this eBook to extend that support—so you have something to return to, revisit, and reflect on in the weeks ahead. Whether you dip in and out or read it cover to cover, we hope it's a companion that offers clarity and calm during this exciting (and often messy!) season of life.

If you ever have questions or need a little more guidance, please don't hesitate to get in touch—we're here for you.

And if you found this helpful, we'd be so grateful if you'd leave us a quick review on Google. It really helps others find us, and it means the world to our business.

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Thanks again for being part of the Unique Births community.

Enjoy this next step,
The Unique Births Team

Your journey. Your choices. Real support.

