

Weaning with Multiples in Mind

During the first year babies grow quicker than at any other time during their lives. This period of rapid growth means that babies need lots of energy and nutrients to ensure that they grow well. Complementary feeding, often called weaning, is the introduction of solid foods into the diet of a baby who is drinking breastmilk or formula milk.

WHEN SHOULD WEANING BEGIN?

Current government guidance suggests that for full term babies, complementary feeding or the introduction of solid foods need to be introduced at or around six months of age. This is a gradual process as breastmilk or formula continues to be the main part of a babies diet up to one year of age.

The recommended introduction of weaning at around six months is to ensure that babies are receiving all of the nutrients they need from the foods they eat. Weaning helps to develop the muscles needed for speech development through biting and chewing. Weaning is a gradual process with the aim that by the time babies are one year old, most will be eating chopped, mashed family food.

These guidelines do not apply to premature babies so if your multiples were premature it is important to ensure that the relevant health professionals i.e. health visitors, doctors and paediatricians are providing appropriate support and information to you about when and how to introduce weaning with babies who are preterm.

Babies must be supervised at all times when weaning.

SHOULD MULTIPLE BIRTH BABIES ALWAYS START WEANING TOGETHER?

Many parents of multiples are keen to start weaning their babies at the same time, but others find that this can be



stressful if one or more is not ready to begin.

Try looking for signs of readiness (see below) in each baby individually. This way you won't be faced with a battle if one baby is uninterested in eating.

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WHAT ARE THE SIGNS THAT THE BABIES ARE READY TO MOVE ON TO COMPLEMENTARY FOODS?

At about six months babies are developmentally ready to start trying solid foods. The babies will be:

- able to sit up and hold their head steady

- showing interest in food
- able to pick up food and put it in their mouth
- no longer automatically pushing out objects from their mouth with their tongues.

Waiting until the babies are ready can mean less work for parents as their babies will be able to cope with mashed food or finger foods such as lightly cooked vegetables and pieces of fruit. An earlier start means that food has to be pureed.

Every baby is different and will develop at his or her own pace, it is important to keep offering different tastes and textures during weaning.

“ I started my daughter first and my son about three weeks later. By waiting it meant he was able to be weaned more quickly as I didn't take it as slowly as I did with my daughter. Within a week or two they were at the same stage.

KATE

HOW CAN PARENTS MANAGE WITH TWO OR MORE?

Weaning should be a relaxed and an enjoyable experience for both parent or carer and babies. To achieve this it is important to be responsive to your babies during feeding and promote a happy and relaxed sociable atmosphere.



Babies may have good days when they eat well and other days when they don't eat and these may differ for each multiple, so it is also important to be mindful of our own anxieties with food.

When both babies start eating other foods there are ways to make mealtimes less fraught. Here are some tips from other mums and dads of multiples:

- Get organised and have everything to hand before you start.
- Seat them upright by using pushchairs, baby bouncers or, when ready, high chairs.
- Always stay with your babies when they're eating in case they start to choke.
- Take off the babies' outer clothes before you feed them, and use plastic bibs to catch the worst of the spills. It is quicker and easier to wipe babies clean, and to rinse bibs under the tap, than to wash and dry clothes after every meal.
- Sharing the same spoon and bowl is not unhygienic as the babies will already be used to sharing things. This is one thing that does not take twice as long with twins - while one baby is busy swallowing, you are popping food into the other baby's mouth. Just be aware of what each child is eating as by using the same bowl we can sometimes get confused about how much each child has eaten especially if one is a slower eater.
- Don't force your babies to eat, make it fun. If they are not interested today try again tomorrow.
- Making your own baby food is cheaper and allows you to introduce different foods and flavours at different times.

- When preparing your own baby food, make more than you need for the next meal, and use small plastic tubs or ice cube trays to freeze it in suitable quantities for future meals.
- Some parents use a mixture of home prepared food and use commercial foods when out and about.
- In warm weather eat outside if possible.
- As soon as possible, encourage the babies to feed themselves, both by using finger food and holding their own spoons or trainer cups.
- Give babies water to drink rather than juice. This is less damaging to their teeth and spills won't be sticky.

“ Try and keep calm as they feel your stress and it makes things more difficult. They are different babies and will take to it differently, but they'll both get there in the end. Both mine are doing great now (nine months) and can feed themselves sandwiches, which is fantastic as you can eat at the same time. I'd definitely encourage them to feed themselves for at least one meal as soon as you can.

RACHEL

HOW CAN BABIES BE ENCOURAGED TO EAT?

Solid foods are often introduced in stages. The ages of the different stages of weaning are approximate and can depend on when weaning is first initiated. Every baby is different and will develop at his or her own pace.

Allowing your babies to touch and play with food at the beginning rather than worrying about how much they will eat is a good way to start. Remember, to begin with they will be getting most of their food from breast milk or formula. Other suggestions include:

- Introduce lots of different foods but if one or all are not interested just offer it again another time, and keep



offering it until they decide to try it. Children need to try a flavour at least fifteen times before they can really decide if they like it or not. You can always mix the flavour with something else to get them to try it e.g. pureed courgette may not be liked on its own but mixed with carrot and potato may be more palatable.

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- Don't narrow the choices of food; babies will be open to all sorts of tastes and textures at this early stage.
- Cooking for all the family means you can give your babies some of what you are eating and reduces the time you spend cooking. Make sure you follow the guidelines for introducing foods to your babies. Babies should not be given food with added salt or processed foods. See **For More Information** section for Government guidelines.
- Try and avoid making mealtimes stressful, learning about new foods should be fun for your babies and allowing them to play is an important part of them developing a positive relationship with food.
- Eating with your children allows you to set a good example for them and becomes possible when they are eating finger foods.

WHAT IS BABY-LED WEANING?

Baby-led weaning is the term used to describe the introduction of solid food by letting your baby choose what they eat, and self-feeding themselves when they are ready, rather than pureeing foods yourself and feeding it to your baby with a spoon.

It is important that finger foods are cut into big enough pieces for your babies to hold in their fists and to stick out of the top, they should not be small enough that they could cause your babies to choke.

This can be messy as your baby gets used to feeding themselves but many foods are ideal for exploring and enjoying in this way.

“ Don't get caught up with having to follow a certain technique. Every meal is going to be a learning experience, be it new flavours and textures from purees or co-ordination skills through to baby-led weaning. The main thing is not to stress as you don't want them to learn that mealtimes are an uncomfortable experience. They are getting all their nutrition from milk anyway so enjoy the mess, exaggerated chomping and the funny faces as they are trying something new.

SARAH

WHEN SHOULD I STOP BREASTFEEDING?

Stopping breastfeeding is a personal decision and one which each family needs to make for themselves. Continue with your breastfeeding as long as you and your babies are happy to do so.

However long you breastfeed, breast milk is a nutritious part of your babies diet and continues to offer them protection against infection. You may find that you will continue to breastfeed one baby longer than the other(s) or you may decide to stop them at the same time.

Tamba's Breastfeeding Peer Supporters can offer information and support to multiple birth mothers wanting to breastfeed and continue breastfeeding.

If you stop before twelve months your babies will need to have formula milk instead, but after twelve months they can have cow's milk as a drink.



“ Baby led weaning has been a game changer for us: our girls (now seven months) join us for mealtimes and we all eat together, the girls can pick up skills at their own pace as they still receive most of their nutrition from milk feeds. It's amazing just how their co-ordination and core strength has come on in a short period of time.

ELEANOR

Introducing cow's milk (full fat) as the main drink is not recommended before one year of age.

“ I started baby led weaning just after six months. My girl took to it quicker than my boy but I just sat him facing her and he just started copying what she was doing.

KAYLEIGH



WHEN SHOULD THE BABIES GIVE UP FORMULA AND BOTTLES?

Introducing cow's milk (full fat) as the main drink is not recommended before one year of age. You can however use full fat cow's milk when cooking for your babies, for example when making a cheese sauce. Babies can also have full fat dairy products such as cheese, yoghurt, fromage frais and custard from six months of age.

Formula can be given in cups once your babies are able to drink from them. Many babies tend to use both cups and bottles but it is generally recommended that bottles are given up around one year of age.

The introduction of solid foods is a crucial stage in your babies' development and introducing new foods at the right time ensures that you can support their development and growth into healthy children. As a parent or carer, weaning is a chance to make a positive impact on your children's diet for life.



See our
Top Tips on
Weaning...

TOP TIPS ON WEANING

From our multiple birth families



- ✓ Firstly do what's right for you and your family, whether that be puree, jars, pouches, baby led or spoon fed. Do what you are comfortable with.
- ✓ Wait till your babies are ready - they'll let you know. Don't try to rush them or try to keep up with your friends with non-premature singletons.
- ✓ Buy a shower curtain or splash mat to go under the high chairs. It does get messy, especially with two or more babies.
- ✓ Embrace the mess and let them get stuck in!
- ✓ Bear in mind that all babies are different, what works for one or what one likes the others might not. Treat each child as an individual when trying different tastes, textures etc.
- ✓ Try not to engage in battles and trust that they'll eat if they're hungry rather than stressing about it all.
- ✓ It's fun eating outdoors (when the weather permits) and living room picnics can help to break up routines if they're having a fussy phase.
- ✓ Try not to stress out and just go with the flow as much as possible.
- ✓ Try to give them lots of different colours and textures.
- ✓ Try to have fun and let them get messy.
- ✓ Think of the first six months of weaning as practicing eating i.e. don't stress about what they did or didn't eat and what ended up on the floor etc.
- ✓ At breakfast give them some toast to occupy them while you make their porridge or baby cereal and then some toast afterwards to buy yourself some time to clear up.

WHAT SUPPORT DOES TAMBA OFFER?

Tamba aims to provide high quality information and mutual support networks for families of twins, triplets and more, highlighting their unique needs to all involved in their care.

Twinline is Tamba's confidential helpline offering parent to parent support. Call 0800 138 0509 between 10am-1pm and 7pm-10pm daily or email AskTwinline@tamba.org.uk.

We have a number of parent support groups for: special needs, one parent families, triplets plus, grandparents and bereavement. We also provide specialist education, speech therapy, educational psychology and family therapy support

through our Honorary Consultants service. See www.tamba.org.uk for more details.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you have any specific questions about weaning your multiples please speak to your health visitor.

For information on Tamba's breastfeeding peer supporters scheme please visit: www.tamba.org.uk/support/breastfeeding-peer-supporter-scheme

We recommend the book entitled 'Twins and Multiple Births - The Essential Parenting Guide from Pregnancy to Adulthood' by Carol Cooper, published

by Vermillion (2013).

Government guidelines and information on weaning are available at:

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/Pages/solid-foods-weaning.aspx

www.nhs.uk/start4life/first-foods

www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/weaning-your-baby

Thank you for downloading our factsheet. Feedback from our user community is very important to Tamba. Please complete this survey to help us continue to ensure we meet the needs of our community:
www.surveymonkey.com/r/supportresources