



National Day Nurseries Association

★Brighter thinking
for early years

Factsheet

A young child with dark hair in two small buns is sitting in a high chair, eating a piece of a carrot stick. The child is wearing a purple patterned shirt. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting. A large purple semi-circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the word 'Factsheet'. Another large purple semi-circle is overlaid on the bottom of the image, containing the title 'Baby-led Weaning'.

Baby-led Weaning

Baby-led Weaning

“Every infant child has the right to good nutrition.”

Convention on the Rights of the Child

This factsheet includes information about baby-led weaning and ways in which childcare providers may work with babies and families to support this method of feeding whilst the baby is at the setting.

Research

Guidelines recommend that babies start to eat solid food at six months, starting with small amounts of food and increasing this gradually as the child gets older. Food consistency and variety should also gradually increase as the child gets older, as should the number of times that the child is fed. The World Health Organisation (WHO) Guidelines recommend two to three meals per day for infants six to eight months of age and three to four meals per day for infants nine to 23 months of age, with one to two additional snacks as required.

There are lots of websites, forums and information about supporting weaning, using the pureed type foods method and the more recent method of starting straight onto finger foods known as baby-led weaning.

What is baby-led weaning?

Baby-led weaning, quite simply, means letting your child feed themselves from the very start of weaning, rather than taking food from a spoon offered by an adult. The term was originally coined by Gill Rapley, a former health visitor and midwife. Baby-led weaning means no purees, no ice cube trays, no food processor, no potato masher and no baby rice. This method is becoming popular as babies can often enjoy eating the same food as the rest of the family and are an active partner in the feeding process. Baby-led weaning is a way of introducing solid foods by letting babies choose what they eat and feed themselves when they are ready. This means it is more likely to tie in with their ability to take food into their mouth, move it around and swallow safely. Although it can be messier at first, parents often say that babies who can choose what to feed themselves have wider food tastes.

The NHS have a comprehensive guide to weaning and the link is below in the ‘Further reading and guidance’ section.

Health and hygiene

Washing bowls, plates and spoons in hot, soapy water, and rinsing them afterwards or washing them in the dishwasher is sufficient for babies over six months of age and they do not need

sterilising. This is due to babies' digestive and immune systems being more mature, so they are less likely to pick up an infection. Bottles still require sterilising up until a baby is 12 months old.

How can early years settings manage this?

It is recommended that methods of weaning are discussed with parents during settling in visits to find out exactly how the child is fed at home. Following these discussions childcare providers can then work together with the parents to meet the child's individual needs.

If the families are using a baby-led approach, then working together with the parent will make this a smoother transition. Some practitioners may feel anxious about this way of feeding so you may need to look at further training for staff and carry out a full risk assessment, which covers smaller ratios during meal times. This should be applied just as an allergy or intolerance would be.

Having regular meetings with parents and sharing progress both at home and in the setting will help.

Top tip

Where possible, liaise with your local health visiting team to ensure parents are receiving consistent advice.

Review and update your food and drink policy about how you work with parents regarding weaning and which method you use.

Gagging versus choking

Gagging is caused when a baby either has too much food in their mouth or if the food starts to go too far back before they have chewed and broken it down sufficiently. Inside the mouth, there is an area known as the gag reflex. When an object touches the gag reflex we gag to remove the object from our mouth and thus prevent ourselves from choking. In babies, the gag reflex is much further forward than in adults and is the body's way of offering extra precaution.

Choking is when a person's airways are blocked causing the person to stop breathing.

Millie's Mark

Supervising children during meal times, having an up to date paediatric first aid training certificate and using mock scenarios all help to prevent incidents. It is vital to ensure that you have a fully trained paediatric first aider on site all the time and to cover holidays, absences and sickness.

Millie's Mark is a special endorsement for settings that have 100% paediatric first aid trained staff who work directly with children and have gone above and beyond minimum requirements. For further information, please visit the Millie's Mark website detailed below.

Further reading and guidance

- WHO Guidance on Baby and Child Feeding: <https://bit.ly/3nQAz6M>
- NHS Guide to Weaning: <https://bit.ly/2r7Hx98>
- Guidance on sterilising feeding equipment: <https://bit.ly/2UJxMuz>
- Information on Millie's Mark accreditation scheme through NDNA: <https://bit.ly/2VWzdf9>

Baby-led Weaning V0.1 – 20th September 2021



National Day Nurseries Association

★Brighter thinking
for early years

Factsheet

Our factsheets are written by early years experts for the early years workforce. Most NDNA factsheets are free to our members.

NDNA is the national charity and membership association representing children's nurseries across the UK. We are a charity that believes in quality and sustainability, so we put our members' businesses at the very heart of ours.

We are the voice of the 21,000-strong nursery sector, an integral part of the lives of more than a million young children and their families. We provide information, training and advice to support nurseries and the 250,000 people who work in them to deliver world-class early learning and childcare.

See the full range of NDNA factsheets at www.ndna.org.uk/factsheets

The information provided in this factsheet is for use by early years practitioners only. It has been written by early years experts but is not intended to be, and should not be relied upon, as a substitute for professional advice. NDNA has endeavoured to ensure the accuracy of the information presented in this factsheet. NDNA assumes no legal liability or responsibility for your interpretation or use of the information contained within it.

National Day Nurseries Association

National Early Years Enterprise Centre, Longbow Close, Huddersfield HD2 1GQ
tel: 01484 407070 fax: 01484 407060 info@ndna.org.uk www.ndna.org.uk