

Better Health Start for Life

Introducing Solid Foods

Campaign Communications Toolkit

If you have any queries, please contact the Partnerships team at
partnerships@dhsc.gov.uk

This campaign communications toolkit contains information to help you promote the campaign in your area. It includes a campaign overview, key messages and suggested long and short copy.

Contents

Campaign overview.....	03-04
Key messages	05-06
Long and short copy	07-08

CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

On 13th February 2023, the Department of Health and Social Care will launch the **Better Health Start for Life - Introducing Solid Foods** campaign. The campaign will offer parents support and advice on introducing solid foods to their babies, helping to cut through misinformation and confusion through three easy to remember prompts:

- **When** to start introducing solid foods
- **Why** it's so important to begin introducing solid foods at around 6 months
- **What** to feed their babies (easy, healthier recipes and guidance on textures and tastes)

Introducing solid foods is a crucial milestone within the first 1,001 days of life. Children's food preferences and eating habits are formed early in life, with consequences for a range of health and development outcomes in later life¹. Official advice is that most babies should not start solid foods until they are around 6 months old, this gives them time to develop properly so they can cope with solid foods.

The campaign will promote waiting until your baby is around 6 months to introduce solid foods, alongside breast milk or infant formula. At this stage, they need solid foods as well as - not as a replacement for - their usual breast milk or first infant formula (which is why it's known as complementary feeding). Introducing solid food teaches your baby how to move solid food around their mouth, chew and swallow solid foods.

As part of the campaign, the [Start for Life Weaning Hub](#) is available to help parents on their journey to introduce solid foods to their baby. Packed with NHS-endorsed advice, videos and tips, plus simple, healthy recipes, it puts everything parents need to know in one place.

Context to introducing solid foods

Children's food preferences and eating habits are formed early in life with consequences for a range of health and development outcomes in later life. Evidence suggests that three-quarters (75%) of UK babies aged 4-18 months are exceeding their energy requirements, which is of concern in relation to the prevalence and risk of overweight and obesity in childhood². With more than a quarter (27.7 per cent) of children already overweight or obese before they start school³, Better Health Start for Life campaigns play a crucial preventative role in supporting parents to get their child's diet right at the earliest stage – when first introducing solid foods to their babies.

According to the World Health Organization, encouraging healthy food variety in children through repeated, positive exposure to new foods, seeing caregivers and family members enjoy healthy foods, and limiting their exposure to unhealthy foods (that may lead to preferences for very sweet foods and drinks), all help develop good food habits in children and their families⁴.

¹ World Health Organisation (2016): Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity

² SACN 2018: Feeding in the First Year of Life & Diet and nutrition survey of infants and young children (DNSIYC), 2011

³ NHS National Child Measurement Programme 2021/22: [National Child Measurement Programme, England 2020/21 School Year - NDRS \(digital.nhs.uk\)](#)

⁴ World Health Organisation (2016): Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Why do we use the word ‘weaning’?

Complementary feeding is the term often preferred by policy makers and practitioners, as ‘weaning’ can be misinterpreted to mean the cessation of breastfeeding rather than the introduction of solid foods. However, a keyword analysis of search engine queries conducted by Public Health England in 2019 showed that weaning is the term most used in search queries on this topic, which indicates that it is the most used and understood term amongst parents. The term ‘complementary feeding’ received an average of 70 monthly UK searches on search engines, and ‘starting solids’ received an average of 95 search queries, whereas ‘weaning’ received an average of 13,000 searches per month.

To mitigate any potential for confusion, in our materials we define weaning as the process of introducing solid foods alongside breast milk or baby’s usual infant formula.

Key Messages

Please find below some example key messages which can be used to develop copy and communicate about the activity. Additional copy, press releases and a range of orderable and downloadable resources will be available on the [Campaign Resource Centre](#), so please check this regularly.

Primary messages

- **Weaning explained:**
Weaning is when you introduce your baby to solid foods, alongside their usual breastmilk or first infant formula, starting when your baby is around 6 months old. It can be confusing knowing when and how to start introducing solid foods. We're here to guide you through the journey and explain what it all means: www.nhs.uk/better-health/start-for-life/weaning
- **When is my baby ready for weaning?**
Lots of parents wonder when and how to start introducing solid foods. Read about the signs that your baby is ready for weaning and what you need to get started: <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/ready-or-not/>
- **Why it is important to wait until around 6 months before you first introduce solid foods:**
It is important to give your baby time to develop properly so they can cope with solid foods. At around 6 months, babies can cope better with solid foods and are more able to feed themselves. They are also better at moving food around their mouth, chewing and swallowing. Read about the signs that your baby is ready for weaning and what you need to get started: <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/ready-or-not/>
- **What should my baby be eating?**
We've got all the information on what to feed your baby and how much. Find out about how to start weaning, different food groups, and how much milk your baby should be having: <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/what-to-feed-your-baby/around-6-months/>
- **Recipes for every stage**
Whatever stage of the weaning journey your baby is on, we've got plenty of easy recipes and meal ideas to inspire you: <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/recipes-and-meal-ideas/>

Secondary messages

- **How can I introduce solid foods safely?**
Babies and young children are highly vulnerable to bacteria that can cause food poisoning and some foods can also be a choking hazard. Read about safe weaning: <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/safe-weaning>
- **What about allergies?**
When you start introducing solid foods to your baby from around 6 months, it's important to introduce foods that can trigger allergic reactions one at a time, in very

small amounts, so that you can spot any reaction. e.g., milk, eggs, gluten, nuts, seeds, soya, fish. Read more about foods that can trigger an allergic reaction: <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/safe-weaning/food-allergies/#anchor-tabs>

Top tips for parents⁵

- In the beginning, you only need to give your baby solid foods once a day, at a time that suits you both.
- Don't worry if your baby hasn't eaten much in a meal or a day - what they eat over a week is more important.
- When your baby's had enough, they'll let you know by firmly closing their mouth or turning their head away.
- Babies learn a lot from watching you eat — sit down together for family mealtimes as much as possible.
- They might pull funny faces, that doesn't mean they don't like it – they're just getting used to new tastes and textures!
- Babies under 12 months don't need snacks. If you think your baby is hungry in between meals, offer extra milk feeds instead.
- If you need to cool food down quickly, put it in an airtight container and let it sit in cold water. Keep stirring the food so it cools throughout.
- During mealtimes, offer your baby sips of water from an open or free-flow cup.

Call to action

- For tips and recipes for each weaning stage, visit www.nhs.uk/better-health/start-for-life/weaning
- For everything you need to know about weaning, tips and recipes, visit www.nhs.uk/better-health/start-for-life/weaning

⁵ www.nhs.uk | Weaning | Start 4 Life (www.nhs.uk)

Long and short copy

Below are examples of long and short copy that can be used in communication about the Better Health Introducing Solid Foods campaign. Please use the copy for any newsletters, emails or other materials, including websites and e-bulletins from 13th February 2023.

Long copy (217 words)

On 13th February, the Department for Health and Social Care will launch the **Better Health Start for Life - Introducing Solid Foods** campaign. Weaning is when you introduce your baby to solid foods alongside breastmilk or infant formula.

The campaign will offer parents support and advice on introducing solid foods, helping to cut through misinformation and confusion through simple, easy to understand information, delivered through three easy to remember 'Weaning 101' prompts; when you should start introducing solid foods, why it's important to wait until around 6 months and what to feed your baby.

The NHS recommends that most parents should wait until their baby is around 6 months old before they start introducing solid foods. By this point, babies can cope better with solid foods and are more able to feed themselves. They are also better at moving food around their mouth, chewing and swallowing.

Lots of parents wonder when they should start and what types of solid food they should be introducing, so a dedicated weaning hub is available on the Better Health Start for Life website offering support and advice during what can be a confusing time.

The weaning hub is packed with NHS-endorsed advice, videos and tips, plus simple, healthy recipes, it puts everything parents need to know in one place.

Visit www.nhs.uk/better-health/start-for-life/weaning

Short copy (177 words)

On 13th February, the Department for Health and Social Care will launch the **Better Health Start for Life - Introducing Solid Foods** campaign. Weaning is when you introduce your baby to solid foods alongside breastmilk or infant formula.

The campaign will offer parents support and advice on introducing their babies to solid food; covering essential 'Weaning 101' advice and support on when you should start introducing solid foods, why it's important to wait until around 6 months and what to feed your baby.

The NHS recommends that most parents should wait until their baby is around 6 months old before they start introducing solid foods. Despite this, lots of parents wonder when they should start and what they should feed their baby. To support parents, a dedicated weaning hub is



available on the Better Health Start for Life website offering support and advice during what can be a confusing time.

The weaning hub is packed with NHS-endorsed advice, videos and tips, plus simple, healthy recipes, it puts everything parents need to know in one place.

Visit www.nhs.uk/better-health/start-for-life/weaning