



Better Health Start for Life Introducing Solid Foods Campaign Communications Toolkit

Campaign launch: 4th March 2022



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

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

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Campaign Overview

On March 4th 2022, the Department of Health and Social Care's Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) 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 baby, during what can be a confusing time.

Weaning is a crucial milestone within the first 1,001 days. 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. Official advice is that most babies should not start solid foods until they are around six 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 six months to introduce solid alongside breast milk or infant formula foods. 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). Weaning teaches your baby how to move solid food around their mouth, chew and swallow solid foods.

As part of the campaign, a 'weaning¹ hub' is available on the Start for Life [website](#) to help parents 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.

An additional focus for this year's campaign is around the theme of confusion. New survey data of 1,000 parents with children aged 3-18 months shows:

- Three in five (59%) first-time parents found the decision to start weaning confusing
- Almost two-thirds (64%) have received conflicting advice on what age to start introducing solid food
- Two in five (40%) of new mums have already introduced solid foods by the time their baby is five months old, even though experts recommend that solid food should be introduced from the age of six months
- After partners, grandmothers are the biggest influence on decision making with over a quarter (28%) of first-time mums reporting their mother had the biggest influence on their decision to start weaning
- The majority (73%) agree there should be one official source for weaning advice

¹ The word 'weaning' is used in consumer-facing materials as this is the term most commonly used amongst non-professional audiences. We also use other, more accurate, terminology, and define weaning as the process of introducing solid foods alongside breast milk or infant formula from around six months of age. A keyword analysis of search engine queries conducted by PHE (Weaning Keyword Research October 2019), illustrated that weaning is the term most used in searches around this topic. The term complementary feeding receives an average of 70 monthly UK searches (this figure derived from analysis of the previous 12 month period from October 2018) on search engines, and 'starting solids' receives an average of 95 search queries, whereas weaning receives an average of 13,000 searches per month.



With a constantly refreshing audience, by February 2022 an additional 650,000 (approx.) new parents will have entered the weaning market since the last campaign in February 2020. 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.

Context to Weaning

Weaning is a critical behaviour within the first 1,001 days.

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 of UK babies are exceeding their energy requirements, which is of concern in relation to the prevalence and risk of overweight and obesity in childhood. With one in five children already overweight or obese before they start school, Start4Life has played 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 families.

Why 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 PHE, illustrated that weaning is the term most used in search queries on this topic, indicating that this is the most used and understood term amongst parents. 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

Primary messages

- **What is weaning?**
Weaning is introducing your baby to solid foods, 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
- **Is my baby ready for weaning?**
Lots of parents wonder when and how to start introducing solid foods. Read about [the signs](https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/getting-ready/) that your baby is ready for weaning and what you need to get started: <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/getting-ready/>
- **What should my baby be eating?**
We've got all the information on what to feed your baby and how much. Find out about different food groups, baby-led weaning and how much milk your baby should be having: <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/what-to-feed-your-baby/around-6-months/>

Secondary messages

- **Recipes for older babies**
Whatever stage of the weaning journey your baby is on, we've got plenty of recipes and meal ideas to inspire you: <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/recipes-and-meal-ideas/>
- **How can I prepare for weaning 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 preparing for weaning safely: <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/safe-weaning>

Advertising copy messages

- **When should I start weaning my baby?** It can be confusing to know when to start weaning. For tips and recipes for each weaning stage, visit www.nhs.uk/better-health/start-for-life/weaning
- **Is it time for solid food?** It can be confusing to know when to start weaning. *Better Health Start for Life* is here to answer those questions that come up. Visit www.nhs.uk/better-health/start-for-life/weaning
- **How much** should my baby be eating? For everything you need to know about weaning, tips and recipes, visit www.nhs.uk/better-health/start-for-life/weaning
- **What should** my baby be eating? Find out all your need to know plus lots of tips and recipes for each weaning stage, visit www.nhs.uk/better-health/start-for-life/weaning



Top Tips for parents

- *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 put it sitting in cold water. Keep stirring 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

Policy Background Messaging

The messaging for the campaign falls within 3 main areas.

Babies being weaned too soon;

Experts recommend that babies are weaned onto solid food when they are around six months old. By around 6 months of age, infants are usually developmentally ready to accept solid foods. However, the last infant feeding survey in 2011 states that 75% babies are weaned before 5 months².

With foods too high in sugar;

Snack foods account for more than one third (34.5%) of the total baby food market, and the highest sugar content is found in processed dried fruit snacks. Growth in the finger

² Successive 5-yearly IFS have documented a trend towards later introduction of solid foods in keeping with changes in national feeding recommendations. In 2003, the UK health departments recommended that solid foods should be introduced when infants are around 6 months old (DH, 2003; SACN/SMCN, 2003). While in 2000 85% of mothers were introducing solid foods before 4 months (McAndrew et al, 2012), Table D.10 shows that this figure had decreased to 51% in 2005, and to 30% in 2010. These data indicate that there has been an increase of nearly 5-fold in the proportion of mothers introducing solid foods after 4 months since the change in policy. McAndrew F, Thompson J, Fellows L, Large A, Speed M & Renfrew M (2012) *Infant Feeding Survey 2010*. Leeds: Health and Social Care Information Centre. Available from: 260 [https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/infant-feeding\[1\]survey/infant-feeding-survey-uk-2010](https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/infant-feeding[1]survey/infant-feeding-survey-uk-2010)



food/snacking market, by 11% in 2017 to 2018, indicates that these foods are increasingly considered an expected and appropriate part of an infant's diet. However, some sweet snacks can contain as much sugar as confectionery³.

In too large a quantity;

75% of babies aged 4-18 months exceed their estimated average requirement of energy⁴. Portion sizes of commercial baby foods (e.g. popular pouches) are large: a portion frequently exceeds estimated energy requirements at meals⁵.

³ Public Health England (2019). Foods and drinks aimed at infants and young children: evidence and opportunities for action: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/commercial-infant-and-baby-food-and-drink-evidence-review>

⁴ In DNSIYC (2013), around 75% of the children (aged 4 to 18 months) surveyed had parent-reported intakes that exceeded the EAR for energy. *Lennox A, Sommerville J, Ong K, Henderson H & Allen R (2013) Diet and Nutrition Survey of Infants and Young Children 2011. London: Department of Health and Food Standards Agency. Available from: <http://digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB08694>*

⁵ First Steps Nutrition Trust: Baby foods in the UK: [Baby_Food_in_the_UK+_2017.pdf\(squarespace.com\)](#)



Long and short copy

Below are examples of long and short copy that can be used in communication about the Better Health weaning campaign. Please use the copy for any newsletters, emails or other materials, including websites and e-bulletins from March 4th 2022.

Long copy (304 words)

On March 4th, the Department for Health and Social Care's Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) 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, and it is a crucial milestone within the first 1,001 days.

The NHS recommends that most parents should wait until their baby is around six 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 and how to start introducing solid food, so a dedicated weaning hub has been created on the Better Health 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.

An additional focus for this year's campaign is around the theme of confusion. New survey data of 1,000 parents with children aged 3-18 months shows:

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- The majority (73%) agree there should be one official source for weaning advice

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



Short copy (188 words)

On March 4th, the Department for Health and Social Care's Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) 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, and it is a crucial milestone within the first 1,001 days.

The NHS recommends that most parents should wait until their baby is around six months old before they start introducing solid foods. Despite this, lots of parents wonder when and how to start introducing solid food, so a dedicated weaning hub has been created on the Better Health website offering support and advice during what can be a confusing time.

An additional focus for this year's campaign is around the theme of confusion after new survey data revealed that three in five (59%) first-time parents found the decision to start weaning confusing. The majority (73%) also agreed there should be one official source for weaning advice.

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