Weaning is the name given to that time when solid foods are gradually introduced into your baby’s diet. This can be a fun but sometimes trying time for parents, when lots of questions come up.

This booklet seeks to answer some of the questions you may have, to enable you to establish your baby on a nourishing, varied diet.

**When should I start giving my baby solid foods?**

Most babies can be satisfied with breast or formula milk alone until they are six months old. You should never start weaning before your baby is four months old (17 weeks).

Many babies are happy with breast or formula milk for longer but weaning should be encouraged by six months of age.

Weaning your baby does not need to be rushed into at exactly 17 weeks but again, should be encouraged by six months.

If your baby was born prematurely, weaning can usually still begin between four and six months from birth. Speak to your doctor or health visitor for more advice, as every baby is different.

**Why is it important to start solid foods?**

By six months your baby needs to be starting ‘solids’ to get more nutrients, such as iron.

Introducing solid foods, as well as giving milk, provides the extra nutrients needed for your growing baby.

Introducing solid foods is also an important step to help develop your baby’s ability to chew, which in turn helps develop the muscles needed for speech.

If solids are started too late, some babies find it difficult to accept different foods and may find chewing and swallowing lumps difficult.

**Why is it important not to wean before at least six months?**

Before four months, your baby may not have developed the co-ordination to swallow solid food safely and they may have poor head control.

Your baby’s kidneys and gut are not always developed enough to cope with solids. Early weaning may increase your baby’s risk of developing food allergies and so it is best to introduce solids after four months.
How will I know if I’m giving my baby a balanced diet?

Until around six months, your baby will get enough nutrients from breast or formula milk to grow and develop well.

As weaning progresses, simply try to ensure that your baby has a variety of foods from each of the food groups below.

Each day, try to include:

- Fruits and vegetables
- Protein rich foods, e.g. meat, fish, beans or pulses
- Dairy foods or calcium enriched dairy free alternatives
- Carbohydrates, e.g. pasta, bread, cereal, potato, rice

How these are given will depend on the stage of weaning. Providing a balanced diet should be easy to achieve if the advice from this booklet is followed. Ask your health visitor if you are concerned.

How do I prepare baby’s food?

Mash, sieve or puree using a blender a small amount of food that you have prepared (see sections on suitable foods for each stage of weaning).

You may need to add some cooled, boiled water, breast or formula milk to mix the food to the right consistency. You could even use some cooled, unsalted water used from cooking the vegetables.

It’s a good idea to use foods that you are cooking for yourself and the family, but to remove baby’s portion before adding any salt. Using your own food is cheaper and helps your baby to get used to family foods.

Especially in the early stages of weaning when amounts taken are very small, you can freeze portions of baby’s food. Freeze small amounts in an ice cube tray or a small plastic container with a lid. Defrost the food as required and heat through thoroughly. Take care if re-heating foods in a microwave – stir foods well to prevent hot or cold spots.

Frozen weaning foods should be date labelled and used within one month.

What’s the difference between home made and bought food?

Commercial baby foods can be useful when you are away from home or in a hurry and they are often fortified with vitamins and iron.
However, try not to rely on them. It is good to give your baby a variety of fresh foods too and to get them used to the diet that you and your family enjoy.

Jars and packets can prove quite expensive especially as there can be a lot of wastage in the early months.

Many commercial baby foods do add gluten and cows milk to their four month jars and packets, so do read the label, especially if your baby has any allergies or there is a history of allergy in the family. (See allergy advice on page 12s and also foods to avoid before six months).

**What about drinks?**

Up to one year old, breast or formula milk are the best drinks for your baby. Encourage your baby to drink plain water rather than flavoured water. Cooled, boiled tap water can be given before 6 months old. After 6 months, tap water can be given as a drink.

Fizzy drinks, squashes and baby drinks are not necessary and can reduce your baby’s appetite. Some can also cause bad teeth and too much can cause diarrhoea.

If you want to give your baby a drink other than milk or water, add a dash of fruit juice (e.g. apple juice) to water.

Cows milk should not be given as a main drink before one year, but can be added to weaning foods from six months.

**What things should I avoid doing?**

- do not leave your baby alone when eating.
- do not add any solid foods to the feeding bottle.
- do not put your baby on a restricted diet unless advised by your doctor.
- do not give your baby honey in foods during the first year, as there is a small risk of developing infant botulism, a severe type of food poisoning.

**Starting weaning**

It is a good idea to set a rule of feeding baby at the table with you and other members of the family if present, but without distractions e.g. TV.

It is always good for your baby to watch and learn from his/her family and to enjoy the social side of eating!

*As weaning can begin anytime between four and six months, the ages given are approximate and show the earliest and latest ages to begin each stage.*

**Stage 1 (six months)**

Start by offering your baby a small teaspoon of food at one feed in the day. Some babies accept this better if they are offered some breast or formula milk first, then a small spoon of food. Other babies will accept food first, and then their usual milk feed.
Solids should be given from a small, shallow plastic spoon. Begin by offering 1-2 teaspoons after one milk feed, perhaps at lunch. Once your baby is used to the spoon and is managing around 5-10 teaspoons, move on to offering food at two meals, then three meals. Be sensitive to your baby’s appetite and let them guide you as to how much to give.

- Don’t add solids to your baby’s bottle.

Foods at this stage are smooth and quite runny.

**Some ideas to try now:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Group</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carbohydrates</td>
<td>Baby rice, unsweetened. Pureed potato. Polenta, tapioca or sago cooked in water with baby’s milk added at the end. Gluten-free rusks (check the box). Baby porridge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pureed vegetables</td>
<td>Carrots, parsnips, cauliflower, spinach, broccoli, avocado, butternut squash, sweet potato, swede.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pureed fruits</td>
<td>Banana, apple, pear, apricot.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can use baby gravy from four months e.g. Cow and Gate, Milupa.

Foods don’t have to be given separately. Try different combinations of the above foods.

**Foods to avoid now**

- Try not to add sugar to your baby’s food - try mashed banana, breast or formula milk to sweeten food if necessary.
- Avoid giving eggs or nuts* before six months.
- Salt (which contains sodium) - see below.
- Don’t give your baby any foods containing gluten. Gluten is found in wheat products e.g. flour, bread, biscuits, some rusks, Weetabix, Ready Brek.
- Fish and shellfish.
- Soft and unpasturised cheeses.
- Low fat foods. Low fat foods are not suitable for babies/children under 2 years old. Fat is an important source of calories and some vitamins which they need. Margarine/vegetable spread may be added to meals to increase calorie intake.

*See section on allergy.

**Salt**

- Babies only need very small amounts of salt and their kidneys are too immature to cope with any added salt.
- Breast milk naturally meets all of a baby’s nutritional requirements and infant formula, is specially made to contain the right amount of salt, if correctly made up.
- During weaning, **no salt should be added to any foods**.
- Weaning products do not have any added salt and if you taste them, you might think...
that they taste bland, but do not add any salt.

- Do not use stock cubes or gravy in your baby’s food as they are often high in salt.
- Avoid using processed foods that are not made specifically for babies, such as cooking sauces, and adult breakfast cereals as these can be high in added salt.
- ‘Low sodium salt’ contains too much potassium and is therefore not suitable for babies/children.

**Helpful hints at Stage 1**

Steam or boil the vegetables until soft. Then sieve or puree. Finally add enough of baby’s milk or water to make them smooth and runny.

To prepare pureed fruit, peel and chop the fruit into pieces. Put in a saucepan with a little water and cook until soft enough to puree.

Make enough for several meals and refrigerate or freeze in an ice cube tray or small containers.

Plan meals ahead and try to be prepared before your baby is hungry.

If your baby screws up his or her face when they first taste a food, don’t assume they don’t like it. Leave it for a few moments, and then try again.

Initially, a lot of food you put in will come out again so try to scoop this up from your baby’s lips and chin and try again.

Even if a food isn’t accepted the first time that you try it, do continue to try that food every so often. It will take a number of tries (15 – 20) of a food before your baby will decide if he/she really likes/dislikes it.

**Stage 2 (usually from six to seven months)**

Your baby should now be used to taking small amounts of solids from the spoon at each meal.

When you feel your baby is ready, offer food which is a thicker puree and then introduce a few small lumps. Your baby will gradually learn to cope with lumper food and larger amounts. At this stage, you need to start reducing the amount of milk you baby has, to encourage an appetite for more solids.

Some ideas to try now:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food group</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meats</td>
<td>Chicken, turkey, lamb, pork, minced meat, liver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulses</td>
<td>Lentils, peas, beans, baked beans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These can be mixed into the foods that your baby already accepts well.

Mix different combinations of meat, fish or pulses with vegetables and potatoes or rice, e.g.

- Lamb, carrots, peas and potato
- Red kidney beans, carrots, celery and sweet potato
Fish, broccoli, carrots and rice
• Pork, apple, swede and potato

Salt and stock cubes or powder should still be avoided.

From six months dairy foods can also be included in the diet, e.g.
✓ hard cheese, grated
✓ full-fat yoghurts
✓ fromage frais
✓ home made white or cheese sauces
✓ baby cheese sauce.

From six months gluten containing foods can also be given e.g. wheat cereals like Weetabix and Ready Brek.

If your baby has any allergies or there is a family history of allergy, eczema, hayfever or asthma, introduction of certain foods should be delayed further. See allergy advice on page 12.

**Sample menu**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Meal</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early morning</td>
<td>Breast or bottle feed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Baby rice/porridge with pureed fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Savoury meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>Savoury meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Breast or bottle feed as usual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Helpful hints at Stage 2**

Try not to let your own likes/dislikes influence what you give your baby; they may like certain foods, even if you don’t!

Meats are difficult to chew so will need to be blended and then as your baby begins to cope with lumpier textures they can be minced.

Try mixing your baby’s food with some sauce from the family dinner. Your baby’s portion should be removed before salt is added.

To help prevent tooth decay, introduce a cup or lidded feeder beaker at this stage.

Make sure your baby’s food gets gradually lumpier so that by around six to seven months, it can be mashed or minced.

Always give savoury foods before sweet foods.
Allow time in the day for preparing and feeding your baby. 
Try to offer a variety of flavours and avoid giving the same food more than once a day.
If your baby is coping well with lumpier, thicker purees, you can introduce some finger foods from six months.
Finger foods could be small pieces of bread, cheese or fruit and can be used as an accompaniment to the main meal. Babies tend to eat them by sucking and gumming them until they go mushy.

**Stage 3 (from seven to nine months)**

Your baby will now hopefully be managing thicker purees containing a few soft lumps.
Try now to offer food that is just mashed with a fork or minced.
Also begin or continue to offer finger foods.

Ideas to try now:

✔ Eggs, well cooked, e.g. scrambled or boiled and mashed.
✔ Bread, toast, breadsticks
✔ Breakfast cereals
✔ Porridge
✔ Pasta
✔ Well cooked basmati rice

### Meal ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakfast</th>
<th>Breakfast cereal or porridge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Toast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scrambled egg or poached egg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fruit or yogurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Breast or bottle feed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lunch</th>
<th>Minced or chopped meat, chicken or pulse vegetable dish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vegetables – chopped or cut into sticks e.g. green beans, carrots, baby sweetcorn, mange tout, turnip, broccoli florets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potato, rice or pasta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yogurt or fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drink of milk or water from a cup</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A guide to weaning your baby

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tea</th>
<th>Baked beans on fingers of toast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fingers of pizza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pieces of cheese, chopped meats or chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fingers of bread with sticks of celery, carrot or cucumber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Soft pieces of fruit e.g. bananas, slices of peeled apple, pear, peach, strawberries, raspberries, stoned cherries or seedless grapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drink of water or milk from a cup</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Breast or bottle feed as required

Helpful hints at Stage 3

Begin to offer or continue to encourage finger foods now. See under Helpful hints at Stage 2.

Continue to encourage your baby to drink from a lidded beaker at meal times, as the aim is to stop bottle feeding after one year.

If you feel unsure about this stage of weaning or any other, do discuss your concerns with your Health Visitor.

Help your baby to learn to feed using a spoon. Try giving your baby a spoon while you feed him too.

Weaning can be a messy time. Allow your baby to touch and play with foods, as this is all part of their development. Many mums spread newspaper or a plastic mat/old shower curtain around the high chair to protect the floor.

Don’t give squashes or juices if at all possible as these can give babies a very poor appetite for solids.

Similarly, try not to give a milk feed too close to meal times as this can decrease their appetite for the solids they need.

Stage 3 & 4

Try to limit the following ‘high salt’ foods

- Bacon
- Cheese
- Salted crisps and chips
- Coated chicken e.g. nuggets
- Corn snacks e.g. Wotsits
- Gravy granules
- Sausages
- Soy sauce
- Yeast extract e.g. Marmite
- Ham
- Noodle snack pots
- Olives
- Pickles
- Potato snacks e.g. Hula Hoops
- Salami
- Smoked meat and fish
- Stock cubes and bouillon
- Tinned products with added salt
These foods are lower in salt and can be used in your child’s diet:

- Unsalted breakfast cereals e.g. Shredded wheat
- Couscous
- Eggs
- Emmental cheese
- Fresh meat and poultry
- Homemade bread with no added salt
- Mozzarella cheese
- Fruit and vegetables - dried, fresh, frozen or tinned (no added salt)
- Pulses (peas, beans, lentils, ‘no added salt’ if tinned
- Porridge oats
- Ricotta Cheese
- Yogurt
- Home made sauces with no added salt
- Home made soup with no added salt
- Pasta and rice
- Plain cheese spreads

Stage 4 (up to twelve months and beyond)

Continue with the advice given at Stage 3, simply making your baby’s diet a little more solid. The aim now is to get your baby onto the family diet and making their meals like the rest of the family. Your baby should be having at least 500-600ml of breast milk or formula daily until at least twelve months old.

Meal ideas and recipes

These recipes and meal ideas are suitable from six months onwards and the texture can be adapted to the stage of weaning your baby is at.

Meal ideas

- Fish in white sauce with vegetables and rice
- Chicken in white sauce with vegetables and potatoes
- Turkey mixed with vegetables and pasta
- Pasta with broccoli and cheese sauce
- Pork, apple, swede and potatoes
- Kidney beans, with pasta and tomato sauce
- Cheesy scrambled egg with toast
- Cauliflower cheese
- Any roast dinner with baby gravy.
Recipe ideas

White sauce

- 25g butter or margarine
- 25g flour
- 300ml milk

Melt the butter in a small saucepan and stir in the flour, using a whisk or wooden spoon, cook for 1 minute.

Gradually stir in the milk and bring to the boil, stirring continuously for about 1 minute.

Alternatively, place all the ingredients in the saucepan and stir continuously while heating gently to remove any lumps.

Vegetables in cheese sauce

Steam or boil a selection of vegetables. Strain and mash. Make a white sauce and add in some grated cheese. Mix into the vegetables.

- cauliflower, broccoli and potato
- parsnips, leeks and peas
- lentils, carrots and onion

Soup

- Mixture of vegetables (e.g. parsnips, swede, cabbage, carrots, broccoli, onions, leeks, well cooked lentils, butter beans, kidney beans, tinned tomato)
- Potatoes or rice or pasta
- Low salt stock cubes or powder if available
- Herbs, fresh or dried

Peel the vegetables and potatoes.

Cut into cubes or slices and place into a large saucepan. Cover with water.

Crumble in the stock cube, if used, and add the herbs.

Gently simmer over a low heat until the vegetables are tender.

The soup can be served as it is, or mashed with a potato masher or put through the blender, to make it smooth.

Serve with fingers of bread.

Soup is a really good option for children who don’t eat many vegetables with their meals. It can also be frozen.
Fish pie

300g potatoes, peeled and chopped into equal sized pieces
2-3 tbsp milk
knob of butter or margarine
200-300g cod or haddock
125ml milk
75g broccoli florets
75-100g frozen spinach
300ml white sauce (see page 8)

Boil potatoes until soft, cream together with milk and butter.

Buy fish, which is skinned and boneless. Poach the fish in the milk. This can be done by placing the fish and milk in a bowl in the microwave (HIGH) or by wrapping in foil on a baking tray in the oven (180°C, 350°F, gas mark 4) until cooked. Drain and flake the fish, keeping the milk for the white sauce.

Cook the broccoli and spinach in a little water until it is cooked.

Make the sauce (see page 8).

Add the flaked fish to the sauce.

Place a layer of the fish mixture into a shallow dish, followed by a layer of chopped spinach and broccoli, finishing with a layer of fish and white sauce mixture. Top with creamed potatoes, sprinkle with grated cheese and chopped parsley.

Bake in a pre-heated oven at 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4 for 15-20 minutes.

This is ideal for family meal times, with extra vegetables to serve.

Spaghetti Bolognese

1 tbsp olive or sunflower oil
250g beef, pork or soya mince.
400g tin of tomatoes
1 small onion chopped
1 green or red pepper chopped
Mixed herbs
½ beef stock cube dissolved in 200ml boiling water
50-75g mushrooms, sliced
1 tbsp tomato puree (not essential)

Brown the mince in the oil.

Add the rest of the ingredients and simmer until reduced to a thick sauce.

The sauce can be served as it is or pureed or mashed further depending on the age of your baby.

Serve with well cooked spaghetti or pasta shapes (which can be blended, as necessary).

Top with or mix in some cheddar or Parmesan cheese, if liked.

This is an ideal meal for the whole family or small portions can be frozen for baby.
**Mild fruity chicken or vegetable curry**

- 1 tbsp olive or sunflower oil
- 500g chicken breast cut into large cubes
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 cooking apple, chopped
- 400g tin of chopped tomatoes
- 1 tbsp tomato puree
- ½ chicken or vegetable stock cube dissolved in 200ml boiling water
- 1 tbsp sultanas
- 1 tbsp mild curry powder.

Heat the oil in a large saucepan, add the chicken and onion and cook for 5 minutes, until the chicken is cooked.

Stir in the curry powder and cook for 1 minute, stirring continuously. Stir in the stock, tomatoes, tomato puree and chopped apple, cover and simmer for 40 minutes. Finally, add the sultanas and cook for further 15 minutes or until the curry sauce is no longer runny.

Alternatively, add a 400g mixture of chunks of potato, diced carrot, sliced mushrooms and spinach instead of chicken with the onion. Then follow the recipe as above, simmering until the vegetables are well cooked and the sauce has reduced.

Serve this for the whole family with rice. Basmati rice is very soft when cooked and ideal for baby too.

**Apple banana bake**

Peel and slice an apple and a banana.

Arrange in a greased oven dish.

Sprinkle with cinnamon and dried fruit.

Cover with foil and bake in a slow oven (150°C/300°F/gas mark 2) for about 30 minutes.

Serve as it is or add some custard.

**Rice pudding**

- 1 tablespoon short grain rice
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 300ml milk
- Nutmeg (not essential)

Grease a small ovenproof dish.

Pour in milk and add rice and sugar.

Sprinkle nutmeg over the top if liked.

Bake in a pre-heated oven (180°C/350°F/Gas mark 4) for about 45 minutes.

Rice pudding can be frozen.

As your baby learns to cope with lumpier foods, add finely chopped dried fruits e.g. apricot, raisins or chopped fresh fruit.
Banana custard

250ml full fat milk
60g instant custard powder
2 medium sized bananas

Heat the milk in a saucepan until nearly boiling.
Add the custard powder and whisk in until smooth and creamy. Remove from the heat.
Mash the bananas with a fork and mix into the custard.
Allow to cool slightly before serving.
Banana custard can be frozen.

Milk and other drinks

Give breast or formula milk up to one year.
Full-fat cows milk can be given as the main drink after one year.
Semi-skimmed milk can be given after the age of two, providing your child is taking an adequate diet.
Fully-skimmed milk should not be given until five years old.
Milk or water should always be the first choice for drinks.
Tea and coffee should not be given as they may inhibit iron absorption.
Do not introduce squash drinks in the first year and use with care after this time. Infants often take too much and this leads to a poor appetite for solids.

Vitamins and fluoride

Breast-fed babies and babies taking less than 500ml of infant formula milk a day should begin vitamin drops at 6 months, or earlier if advised by your healthcare professionals.

Allergy advice

For infants and young children who suffer from eczema, hayfever, asthma or proven food allergies, or are from a family with a clear history of these, it is best to delay the introduction of peanuts until about three years of age (or until advised by your doctor).
For other infants there is no need to specifically delay the introduction of peanuts. Peanuts of a suitable texture can be introduced from 1 year of age. Whole nuts are not recommended for children under the age of five years due to the risk of choking.
In the allergic child or where there is a strong family history of allergy, precautions to avoid highly allergenic foods until nine - twelve months may be appropriate. Speak to your health visitor about careful weaning if you are worried.
Useful books to buy

First Meals by Annabel Karmel
ISBN: 077157648x
The Healthy Baby Meal Planner by Annabel Karmel
ISBN: 0671750194
Good Food for Kids by Dr Penny Stanway
ISBN: 0600600793
Lorraine Kelly’s Baby and Toddler Eating Plan by Lorraine Kelly and Anita Bean
ISBN: 0753507277
First Foods Fast – How to prepare good simple meals for your baby by Lara Boyd
ISBN: 1842820028

Useful addresses

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vegetarian Society of the UK Ltd</th>
<th>National Eczema Society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parkdale</td>
<td>163 Eversholt Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunham Road</td>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altrincham</td>
<td>NW1 1BU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>Tel: 0171 388 4097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA14 4QG</td>
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<td>Tel: 0161 928 0793</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The British Allergy Foundation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deepdene House</td>
<td>Providence House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Bellgrove Road</td>
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<td>N1 0NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA16 3BY</td>
<td>Helpline: 0345 010 203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpline: 0891 516 500</td>
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</tr>
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Further information

Please speak to your health visitor if you have any worries or queries about weaning your baby.