

ANNABEL'S TOP 10 WEANING TIPS

Weaning isn't always a straightforward process, as babies have minds of their own – and very distinctive tastes, too! Just when you think you've got it cracked, your baby can suddenly develop eating patterns that leave you anxious and concerned. The good news is that there's a solution for everything. Bear these 10 simple tips in mind and you'll soon have your baby enjoying mealtimes and on course for a lifetime of healthy, happy eating!

1 To avoid your baby becoming a fussy eater, try not to offer her the same purées again and again. Introduce plenty of variety, and if your little one digs in her heels, try mixing new foods with old favourites, until they become familiar.

2 Babies sleep better at night if their tummies are full and they are given foods that keep them satisfied for a longer period of time. It is therefore important for them to have a balanced meal at night that contains protein, which takes longer to digest than carbohydrates. Some protein-rich foods, such as eggs, dairy products, fish, and poultry have the added benefit of being naturally high in tryptophan, which may also help to improve sleep.

3 Babies need proportionately more fat in their diet than adults so it's important to introduce food such as meat, chicken, and cheese from six months and not give only fruit and vegetable purées. Cook with healthy oils such as rapeseed and olive oil. Nut butters and sauces made with whole milk dairy products are also good. Don't give low-fat dairy products.

4 If your baby is putting on excessive weight, make sure you aren't pressing her to eat past the point that she wants to. Babies are born with an innate ability to self-regulate food intake and



I'm in charge! Don't worry if your baby makes a mess – this is all part of learning to feed herself and also a lot of fun!

no baby needs to clear their bowl. Consider cutting down milk feeds if your baby is getting more than 600ml (1 pint) per day, and speak to your doctor or healthcare provider.

5 Allow your baby to make a mess! Not only will she enjoy eating more, but she'll also be more likely to experiment with different foods, thus developing independent eating habits.

6 If your baby is reluctant to try new foods, hide them in more familiar ones. For example, you can try mixing foods such as spinach or meat with sweet-tasting root vegetables. It's also good to combine savoury and sweet foods such as chicken, sweet potato, and apple. Another way to introduce new foods is as finger foods, as your baby will play with them and put them in her mouth out of curiosity. Remember, it can take many attempts before she accepts a new food.

7 Go at your baby's pace. She may enjoy new foods and consistencies one day but turn her nose up the next. She may also be hungrier some days than others. Try to introduce new foods when she's happy and stick to favourites when she's grumpy. If she doesn't take quickly to new textures, lumps, or chunks, don't panic. Try some of the tips suggested in this book, and relax.

8 Make every effort to make mealtimes a positive experience for your baby. If she senses anxiety or disapproval, she'll find the experience daunting and upsetting. Praise her often, laugh, sing, and show delight at her achievements. Join her by eating a little of what she's having and she'll feel part of the family, too, and begin to associate eating with happy times.

9 Never leave your baby alone when she's eating, as she can choke on even the tiniest piece of food (see page 80). Not only that, but keeping your baby company while she's eating will teach her that eating is a sociable experience, and one to be enjoyed.

10 Plan ahead and freeze batches of foods in ice-cube trays or small pots so you don't need to cook every day.

WHAT SHOULD MY BABY BE DRINKING?

First and foremost, it's important to remember that your baby's tummy is small and if she fills up on milk or water at mealtimes, she's unlikely to eat very much. It's a good idea to get your baby used to drinking from a cup, so try offering some of her normal milk feeds from a beaker (express a little, if you are breastfeeding), and offer water in a beaker between feeds or meals.

Offer your baby water or milk at the end of a meal – these are the only drinks babies need. If you do offer juices, dilute them well and limit them to mealtimes to protect your baby's emerging teeth. Fruit juices mustn't be given full strength as they will fill a baby up with sugar and little else.

Don't give your baby tea to drink as it contains tannins that can hinder essential iron absorption.

Alongside this milk and water, your baby will still need her usual milk feeds, which provide her with the nutrients she needs to grow and develop.

