



Weaning your baby: additional information

High calorie weaning advice for infants under 1 year who need additional support with weight gain and growth

When is a high calorie weaning diet advised?

There may be times when babies grow more slowly than expected or even lose some weight and this is known as **faltering growth**.

There can be many complex reasons why a baby's growth falters, including:

- **Reduced feeding:** Some babies cannot manage enough breast milk, infant formula or solid foods to meet their needs due to reasons such as pre-maturity, severe reflux, developmental delay or physical feeding difficulties, such as cleft palate;
- **Reduced appetite or willingness to feed:** Problems such as constipation, colic or reflux can reduce appetite and some infants can start refusing feeds after negative experiences such as sore throats, vomiting bugs or a choking episode;
- **Higher than usual energy needs:** Medical conditions such as heart problems, surgery, metabolic disorders or frequent periods of illness can mean that some babies require more calories than is usual.

It can be very worrying for parents when there are concerns about their baby's weight gain, but your paediatric dietitian will be able to provide nutritional support advice that is tailored to the individual needs of your baby.

High calorie weaning tips to help your baby gain weight and grow

If your baby is only managing small amounts of their weaning solids then there are ways to maximise the calorie content of their meals and snacks.

From 17 weeks to 6 months:

Your paediatric dietitian may recommend high calorie supplements that can be added to expressed breast milk, infant formula or pureed foods to fortify them. A specialist high-energy infant formula milk may also be prescribed for your baby to replace regular infant formula (if using) or it can be added to purees and cereals as part of their weaning diet.

- First stage purees are generally vegetable and fruit based but they can be enriched with added breast or infant formula milk as well as powdered baby rice;
- If a specialist high calorie baby milk has been prescribed for your baby, use this to enrich pureed vegetables and baby cereals;

At around age 6 months and beyond:

The calorie content of your baby's weaning diet can also be boosted with the addition of foods which are high in fat as this is the richest source of energy:

- Start to add ½ to 1 teaspoon of butter, oil, cream or cream cheese to a 2 tablespoon serving of mashed potato or vegetable puree. This can be added to either home-made purees or jars of baby food;
- A teaspoon of grated cheese will also add calories to cooked meals but cheese can be very salty so use only small amounts in the early stages;
- Add 1 to 2 tablespoons of cream or custard to a serving of fruit puree or stewed fruits;
- Use high calorie formula (if prescribed) or full cream (Channel Island) milk to make up cereals and use this in cooking where possible – for example making mashed potato, white or cheese sauce or rice pudding;
- If your baby is not having breast or formula milk after age 1 year, give them full cream (blue top milk) as their main drink up to age 2 years because of the additional energy and vitamin content;
- Choose full cream dairy products (yoghurts and cheeses) not the reduced fat or diet versions;
- Once your baby is established on regular meals, start to add in a dessert course at lunch and dinner time – nutritious dessert ideas you could try:
 - ✓ To your baby's fruit add 1-2 tablespoons of double cream or custard.
 - ✓ Rice pudding
 - ✓ Fruit puree or mashed and custard,
 - ✓ Full fat yogurt or fromage frais
 - ✓ Fingers of fruit or slices to dip into custard or yoghurt.
 - ✓ Crème caramel or other dairy desserts
- Cook meats, fish or lentils with added butter or oil instead of baking or grilling them;
- Use high calorie (not low fat) spreads and dips with breads and crackers – for example butter or spreads cream cheese, mashed avocado, humus, melted cheese or smooth nut butter;
- Include vegetables with the majority of meals but add a little melted butter, oil or crème fraîche to boost calories and aid the absorption of certain vitamins.

If your baby has a small appetite, try to avoid giving them drinks just before or during meals as this can fill them up. It can also help to give them a small snack as a top up between meals – but stick to a regular snack time rather than letting them graze throughout the day so that they develop some appetite for their main meals.

Ideas for high calorie but small snacks include:

- One or 2 fingers of toast, pitta, mini rice cakes or crackers spread with butter, cream cheese, hummus, mashed avocado or smooth peanut butter;
- Small strips of mild cheese (or a tablespoon grated) with cut up grapes, cherry tomatoes or cucumber batons;



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- About half a ripe banana;
- One or 2 mini shortbread bites, plain fairy cakes or madeleines;
- Small pieces of enriched breads such as croissant, brioche or Scotch pancake – can also be buttered.

Sources of reference

Shaw, Vanessa et al; *Clinical Paediatric Dietetics*. (5th Edition). Wiley Professional, Reference & Trade (Wiley K&L), 2020.

British Dietetic Association (BDA); July 2020: Food Fact Sheet: Complementary feeding (weaning)

NHS Start for Life – How to Start Weaning your Baby; <https://www.nhs.uk/start-for-life/baby/weaning/how-to-start-weaning-your-baby/>

NHS Website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/weaning-and-feeding/food-allergies-in-babies-and-young-children/> (Nov, 21)

NHS Get help to buy food and milk – Healthy Start. <https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/>

NHS Vitamins for Children - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/weaning-and-feeding/vitamins-for-children/> (May 2024)

Contacting us

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RBFT Paediatric Dietitians, November 2024

Next review due: November 2026

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