

# Start4Life Questions and Answers

## Questions Health Care Practitioners might ask Start4Life:

### What is Start4Life?

Start4Life is a government campaign to support a better start in life for infants from birth, by providing healthcare professionals with accessible, concise information about the recommendations on breastfeeding, appropriate introduction of solid foods and active play. Start4Life has translated these recommendations into 6 different “behaviours” for new parents to follow, with key messages and tips to engage new parents and make it easier for the recommendations to be understood and adopted.

### Who is Start4Life for?

Start4Life messaging is directed towards pregnant women, new mums, and their partners and key influencers and supporters (grandparents, siblings). As part of the Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives government initiative, it focuses on promoting behaviours from birth (not conception) that will help to reduce the incidence of overweight and obesity (and related illnesses) in later life. It therefore does not aim to cover health information for mums during pregnancy such as food to avoid, folic acid supplements, alcohol or smoking. These are important messages in themselves that mums may already be aware of and could over-complicate the Start4Life messaging at this stage.

### What is Change4Life and how does Start4Life fit in?

Change4Life is the hugely successful Department of Health led campaign, launched in 2009 to fight the rising tide of obesity in England. Its initial audience has been families, particularly those most at risk of overweight and obesity, and it is recognised by over 80% of mums across the country. Change4Life encourages families to eat well and move more and provides some of the tools and information to overcome some of the barriers many people face in doing so. Start4Life is part of the Change4Life campaign, targeting pregnant mums and new parents. It is about starting with healthy habits so that the challenges of breaking unhealthy habits, such as poor diet and sedentary behaviour, are less likely to arise later on.

## **Who supports Start4Life / How does Start4Life fit with existing government and stakeholder led initiatives for pregnant mums and new parents/carers?**

Start4Life is a Department of Health campaign that is supported across government. It supports the Healthy Child Programme and its advice is also complementary and in alignment with the existing messaging from the following initiatives:

- NICE guidelines on infant feeding
- UNICEF's Baby Friendly Initiative
- NHS Baby Lifecheck
- DCSF Early Years Foundation Stage
- DCSF Teenage Pregnancy Strategy
- NHS Pregnancy Book
- NHS Birth to five publication
- NHS Choices pregnancy planner and online Birth to five.

## **How does Start4Life fit in with the Healthy Child Programme (HCP),(formerly the Child health promotion programme)?**

The Healthy Child Programme is the core delivery programme for universal health promotion from pregnancy to 5 years. It oversees the health and development of children and is used by health care practitioners to support parents to protect and promote every child's health. By reinforcing the importance of getting it right from birth, Start4life fully supports the Healthy Child Programme by focusing on vital issues such as breastfeeding, introduction of solid foods and active play. Specifically it has the potential to facilitate the following aims of the HCP: (1) strong parent – child attachment and positive parenting, resulting in better social and emotional wellbeing among children, (2) care that helps to keep children healthy and safe; (3) healthy eating and increased activity, leading to a reduction in obesity; (4) disease prevention, and (5) increased rates of initiation and continuation of breastfeeding. By raising awareness of the crucial importance of these early years as a foundation for the future it may also help with these further HCP aims: (6) readiness for school and improved learning; (7) early recognition of growth disorders and risk factors for obesity; (8) early detection of developmental delay, abnormalities and ill health.

## **Why should I support Start4Life?**

Currently, although around 8 in 10 mothers in England initiate breastfeeding, rates quickly reduce to 50% by 6 weeks and less than 1% of mothers exclusively breastfeed at 6 months. In addition, the relatively recent change in advice for introducing solid foods from 4 months to 6 months has left some confusion. Start4Life provides a holistic approach to infant feeding and active play from age 0-2 and is a bright, colourful, well-researched and accessible way of promoting this information in a way that is easy to understand and adopt. It follows the look and feel of the well-received and trusted Change4Life campaign.

## **What are the Department of Health guidelines on feeding infants?**

The optimal nutrition for infants is exclusive breastfeeding until around 6 months (26 weeks), after which breastfeeding (and/or breastmilk substitutes, if used) should continue beyond the first six months, along with appropriate types and amounts of solid foods. Around 6 months is the recommended age for the introduction of solid foods for infants. All infants should be managed individually so that insufficient growth or other adverse outcomes are not ignored and appropriate interventions are provided.

## **Why did the government policy on introducing solid foods change from 4 to 6 months?**

Government policy in the UK has consistently supported breastfeeding as important in the promotion of maternal and infant health. Early in 2000, the World Health Organisation (WHO) commissioned a systematic review of the published scientific literature on the optimal duration of exclusive breastfeeding and as a result, revised its guidance in 2001 to recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of an infant's life. In 2001, the UK Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) considered this revised recommendation and concluded that there was sufficient evidence at the population level to advise that exclusive breastfeeding for six months is nutritionally adequate. From 2003 onwards, UK Health Departments adopted this revised guidance and therefore now recommend introduction of foods at around 6 months of age. The WHO review assessed the effects of exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months on child health, growth and development, and maternal health, compared with exclusive breastfeeding for 3-4 months. The conclusions were that there were no benefits of introducing solid food between 4 and 6 months, and no deficits in growth in infants who were exclusively breastfed for 6 months.

Further details about the change in recommendation can be found at the following link: [http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_4097197](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4097197)

## **Are there any risks associated with waiting to introduce solids at 6 months?**

In the WHO review described above it was found that there were no benefits of introducing solid food between 4 and 6 months, and no deficits in growth in infants who were exclusively breastfed for 6 months. There was also no evidence that infants starting to take solid food at 6 months rather than 4 months were "fussier" eaters or had differences in appetite, or that the delay had an adverse effect on their ability to chew.

## **What are the proven benefits of breastfeeding?**

Breastfeeding benefits infant and mother in many different ways:

Breastfed babies are less likely to:

- develop juvenile-onset insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus
- develop eczema
- develop infections of the ear, chest and gut
- be constipated
- be fussy about new foods.

Mothers have:

- a lower risk of developing breast cancer
- a lower risk of ovarian cancer
- increased likelihood of returning to their pre-pregnancy weight  
(since breastfeeding burns up to 500 extra calories a day)
- delayed resumption of menstrual cycle (and so are less likely to conceive at a time when the infant is still placing huge physical demands on the mother).  
This also helps mothers to maintain their iron stores.

## **Why should mothers breastfeed until they introduce solid foods rather than move to formula after the baby has benefited from colostrum?**

The above benefits of breastfeeding for the mother and her baby increase for every day that breastfeeding continues. Hence the Start4Life behaviour “every day counts”

## **Is Start4Life relevant to anyone else?**

Yes. Mums need support from their partners and others, such as grandparents or siblings, whose experience they draw on at the start of their baby’s life. It is vital that these people are also aware of Start4Life messages and the reasons for them, particularly as some of the advice will be different to when they had children. From a professional perspective all health care practitioners, vitally midwives and health visitors, have a crucial role in promoting consistent messages around breastfeeding, appropriate introduction of solid foods and activity, and Start4Life provides the platform to do just that.

## **Questions that pregnant women and new mothers might ask ambassadors of Start4Life:**

### **Why should I start to breastfeed? My friends don’t breastfeed and their babies are okay / I wasn’t breastfed and I’m okay**

Mums milk helps to protect babies from infections in a way that can’t be found anywhere else. In fact, giving your milk to your baby makes a big difference to both your baby and your health now and in the future.

Babies who are breastfed are less likely to:

- Develop eczema
- Be hospitalised through ear, chest and tummy bugs
- Be fussy about new foods when they grow up
- Be constipated
- Be obese which means they are less likely to develop associated illnesses when they are older
- Develop diabetes

### **Why not go straight to formula?**

Formula milk is made of cow’s milk and other added ingredients. It does not contain the ingredients that only your body can make. Mum’s milk is packed with anti-bodies to protect against disease now and later in life. Mum’s milk changes on a daily basis based on the changing needs of her individual baby.

### **Could breastfeeding harm me? What’s in it for me?**

Breastfeeding lowers the risk of mum getting breast and ovarian cancer. Breastfeeding naturally burns about 500 extra calories a day so mums who breastfeed often find it easier to go back to pre-pregnancy weight. Breastfeeding saves money – formula feeding can cost as much as £45 a month.

## **I'm not the breastfeeding type**

Many women feel like this at first. You may not have imagined yourself becoming a mother a few years ago and in the same way it can be hard to imagine what breastfeeding might be like. Before you have your baby it's worth watching the "From Bump to Breastfeeding" DVD (you can request this from your midwife) to see how the mothers get on.

If you are worried about not being able to breastfeed, did you know that only 2% of women are physically unable to breastfeed? Lots of mums find it difficult to start with. Often this is because they haven't been able to get the skilled help to help them overcome these. This can be about just feeling comfortable and finding the right way of holding and feeding your baby. This can make a big difference.

The Dept of Health booklets "Off to the best start" and "Birth to Five" are full of information on positioning and attachment to help you - your midwife or health visitor is also on hand to help. As well as all the benefits to your baby, breastfeeding is a rewarding and bonding experience. It also helps you to lose your baby weight and it could even reduce your risk of breast and ovarian cancer later in life.

## **It's too tiring, painful and harder to establish a routine / My baby takes ages and sometimes falls asleep mid feed / I have to feed every two hours and my baby won't attach properly**

Breastfeeding can be hard to adjust to at first. Don't be afraid to ask for the help you need to make breastfeeding work for you and your baby. No problem is too small. If something is worrying you, the chances are that other mothers will have felt the same. To find out what help is available in your area, talk to your midwife or health visitor, or to talk to a volunteer mother on the National Breastfeeding Helpline on 0300 100 0212 (lines are open from 9.30am to 9.30pm). These mothers have breastfed their own babies and have in-depth training to help support new mothers. They take calls in their own homes so if your call is not answered call back in a few minutes, they will answer when they can. You can also go to the website at [www.nationalbreastfeedinghelpline.org.uk](http://www.nationalbreastfeedinghelpline.org.uk)

If you are starting to breastfeed and are feeling overwhelmed, remember that after 6 weeks most babies feed less often, take less time to feed, and have usually settled into a pattern. It does get easier. Remember babies can breastfeed with you lying down so you can rest whilst you feed your baby. Babies may only require a formula feed every 4 hours but this is because formula takes longer for their developing digestive system to process.

Some training in basic breastfeeding techniques can help – this is available from a peer supporter, your midwife or health visitor. There may also be specialist drop-ins in your area where you can go if you have a specific concern or difficulty.

You may also like to have a look at the "Off to the best start" booklet for positioning tips, ask your health visitor for your own copy of the "From Bump to Breastfeeding" DVD, or ask your midwife or health visitor for a one to one session.

## **I understand about colostrum but why not give some formula once my baby has had the benefit of that?**

The latest scientific research shows that each day and week of breastfeeding has a cumulative effect on protecting baby against infections and strengthening their ability to fight disease. Giving formula can reduce the protection from your breastmilk. So for as long as you give your baby your milk you give them the ability to fight germs either you or your baby have picked up – reducing the risk of illnesses that can put babies in hospital. Mum's milk changes daily, weekly and monthly to meet baby's growing needs. Exposing babies to different flavours via breast milk helps them to develop a taste for a greater variety of foods later on. Breast milk doesn't require bottles or sterilising equipment and is always the right temperature.

## **It means I can't go out as there's nowhere when I'm out and about to feed, it's too embarrassing**

There are breastfeeding-friendly cafes across the country, and some children's and department stores have breastfeeding areas. When you are out and about, make sure you wear a loose top to make feeding easier, and trying taking a muslin or scarf with you to drape over your shoulders and chest so you can stay discreet if you need to whilst you carry on with your life. You might also want to go along to a local breastfeeding group. It's a great way of making new friends as well as sharing the ups and downs of looking after a new baby. Most groups usually include a mix of healthcare professionals and local trained volunteer mothers (peer supporters). You can find out from others in there where they go to feed their babies when out shopping.

## **I have to do all the night feeds**

At the start, you may feel that you are doing nothing but feeding, but gradually your baby will get into a pattern of feeding and the amount of milk you produce will settle. Your baby is happier when near to you and fed when hungry – and this will quickly help your body to produce the amount of milk your baby needs. At night, your baby is safest sleeping in a cot in the same room as you. This makes feeding easier and reduces the risk of cot death. Try to take each day as it comes. If you are very uncomfortable or sore, ask for help.

## **I want my partner to be able to bond with the baby too**

Some parents worry that breastfeeding will make it harder for a partner to bond with the baby but this doesn't have to be the case. Your partner can bond with your baby in lots of different ways, like bathing, changing nappies, carrying the baby in a sling and bringing your baby to you when it's time for a feed. Dads have an important role to play in supporting their partner - for example, practical things such as preparing meals or providing extra help so you can get some rest and making sure you have a cool drink to hand when you are feeding.

When your baby is older, your partner can also help with feeding using expressed milk.

You can express milk by hand or with a pump, whichever is more comfortable for you.

Breastmilk can be stored for:

- up to five days in the fridge at 4°C or lower. This means putting the milk in the coolest part of the fridge, usually at the back (do not keep it in the door)
- up to two weeks in the freezer compartment of a fridge, or
- up to six months in a domestic freezer, at minus 18°C or lower.

Breastmilk must always be stored in a sterilised container. It helps to label the bottles with the time and date so you know which to use first. If you use a pump, make sure you wash it thoroughly after use and sterilise it before use. If you have frozen milk, this should be defrosted in the fridge and used straight away.

## **When is the right time to introduce solid foods?**

Starting solid food at the right time is vital for your baby's health. Experts advise you to wait until your baby is around 6 months. At Start4Life we recognise the importance of treating every baby as an individual, so here are three key signs that when present together mean your baby is ready for solid food:

- They can stay in a sitting position whilst holding their head steady
- They can co-ordinate their eyes, hands and mouth (ie look at food, grab it and put it in their mouths themselves)
- They can swallow their food (if they are not ready most of it will be pushed back out)

A good test is the banana challenge - if your baby is able to sit up and hold its head steady, reach out and grab half a peeled, ripe, banana and eat some of it all by themselves, they are ready!

## **My baby is big for his age / in the top percentile for weight so should I introduce solids early?**

Generally no. Babies are ready for solid food at around 6 months, not when they reach a particular size. But every baby is an individual so if your baby shows all three of the above signs then he may be ready. Try the banana challenge to help you decide.

## **Why wait until 6 months?**

Research now shows that feeding your baby solid food before around 6 months could lead to your baby getting an upset tummy. This is because babies are developing on the inside as well as the outside, and although we can't see it, it takes about 6 months for a baby's digestive system to work properly, and be able to cope well with solid food. Plus, if you feed them breast milk up to and beyond 6 months it gives them even more protection against infections.

## **What if the baby is still hungry?**

If your baby is still hungry, extra milk, preferably breastmilk, is all your baby needs until they display the signs of being ready for solids. Just because they seem interested in your food, start to wake again in the night or are feeding more frequently does not mean they are ready to start on solid food.

## **For my last baby the guidelines said to introduce solids at 4 months – why have they changed from 4 to 6 months?**

- These recommendations are based on a review carried out by the World Health Organisation in 2001, into the best nutritional advice for the first six months of an infant's life. The review assessed the effects of breastfeeding and the age at which solid foods are introduced on child health, growth and development and also maternal health.
- There were no benefits of introducing solid food between 4 and 6 months, and no deficits in growth in infants who were exclusively breastfed for 6 months. Most importantly it was found that baby's tummies are not developed sufficiently prior to 6 months to cope efficiently with solid food.

## **It says “Suitable for 4 months” on baby food jars**

Baby food jars with “from 4 months” on the label are based on outdated guidelines and research. The Food Standards Agency has applied to the European Union for this to change however things like this do take time.

## **My baby wakes in the night – is he ready for solid foods?**

It's normal for babies to start waking up in the night. It is particularly common around three to five months. There are lots of reasons for this - for example, teething -and it doesn't necessarily mean they're hungry. At this age, their digestive system is still developing and there is no evidence that introducing solid food at this stage will encourage them to sleep through. If they are having a hungrier spell you may need to breastfeed more often for a while but they usually settle again after a few days.

## **He's chewing his fists – he must be ready**

Chewing fists, fingers or putting things into their mouth is a natural developmental behaviour for children and alone is not a sign that they are ready for solid food prior to 6 months.

## **Once they are ready, how much should I try to give them?**

A baby's stomach is only about the size of their clenched fist, so it is vital to give portions that reflect this. Larger portions can make them feel uncomfortable, get them into a habit of overeating and put them at risk of health and weight problems later in life.

## **Why not just stick to what they like?**

If you give a baby lots of different healthy foods to try when babies and toddlers they are less likely be fussy about new foods as they grow up. From 6-12 months babies are receptive to new foods so it's important to introduce lots of variety of healthy foods early. Habits are also formed in this time so giving a small range of foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt will set an unhealthy precedent for later in life.

## **My baby won't eat anything I offer/My baby won't eat anything healthy and I need to get him to eat something**

Have your baby eating with the family as early as possible. Breastfed babies have been enjoying the tastes and flavours of the foods you have been eating through your milk. This seems to help them to accept and eat foods more easily as they get older.

Babies like familiar foods so are unlikely to eat something the first time you offer it –sometimes you need to try 10-15 times before your baby will take it. Try freezing baby portions in ice cube trays so that you can try again at a later date without wasting food. Remember, babies copy their parents so encourage them by eating lots of healthy foods yourself. And its important to keep track of the quantity and variety of what your baby eats over the period of a week rather than in a day.

## **How can I avoid giving them a sweet tooth? My baby only likes sweet things**

Giving your baby a sweet tooth early on puts them at a higher risk of being overweight or obese which can lead to type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer later in life. To avoid this:

- Don't give them drinks with added sugar - its also bad for their teeth and like giving a lolly to suck on all day
- Introduce a variety of foods and textures, not just pureed fruits, and definitely nothing with added sugar or honey
- After about six months, it's a good idea to introduce a cup at mealtimes. It's best not to put anything in it other than water, formula or breastmilk. If your baby will only take fruit juice dilute it with boiled and cooled water and offer it only at mealtimes. Don't add honey, syrups or sweeteners to this water.
- Between meals give them snacks such as rice cakes, vegetable sticks, breadsticks, fruit and fingers of white toast with cheese spread instead of sugary snacks.

## **Why cook fresh food when the baby food jars are so easy and made by brands I trust? I don't have time to make baby meals and the jars are so easy**

Lots of baby food in jars has a similar texture and taste – that means your baby has less variety early on and may be more likely to be a fussy eater when they progress from baby food jars. Many jars contain more than one portion so it may also be tempting to try to overfeed your baby.

## **Is it okay to give my baby more solid food when they are crying?**

Babies form their relationship with food very early – using solid food as a comforter rather than fuel can also encourage this to extend into later life.

## **What are the guidelines on salt? Can I just puree what we are having for dinner?**

Salt is damaging to babies, especially their kidneys, so it's important to make sure your baby's food has no added salt. It is a good time-saving idea to mash some of your vegetables and get your baby used to eating the variety of foods that you eat, however make sure you cook them without salt or spices and add these to your food afterwards.

## **Why should I get my baby moving?**

Babies who are inactive for too often and too long do not have as much opportunity to develop as active babies. Being active takes brain and muscle power so it plays an important role in your baby's development. Playing with your baby gives you a great chance to bond and like adults, babies burn energy by moving around so (you never know) it might help them sleep too!

## **How can I stimulate my baby?**

Babies love being sung or talked to, in fact they just love being with you. Spending time with your baby is an important part of their development. Put on some music and move with them holding their arms, sing nursery rhymes to them with 'actions' and try to keep the television off as much as possible. Babies who watch too much TV will get less chance to be active, which may lead to health and weight problems later in life.

Here are some more of the things that babies just love to do with mum, dad and other playmates:

**Cuddles and wiggles:** Even very little babies can be active! Getting them out of their cot or rocker for a cuddle or a game of peek-a-boo is a great way of getting them to interact and move their muscles. They also love to kick their legs and wiggle about so make sure they have enough space when they lie down.

**Playing:** Whether it's with toys, mum, dad, or friends, any form of play is a good way for babies to interact and be active, even when they are tiny. You can find out what's going on for parents and babies at your local leisure centre, or why not take them for a play in the park or your local swimming pool. And if they are too little, playing at bath time, or just wriggling around on the floor is great fun, and good for them.

**Crawling about:** It's the first time your baby has the chance to explore, and the living room is an exciting place to be. Make some space for them to explore their surroundings safely.

**Toddling around:** Practice makes perfect, and it's an important part of growing up, so it's good to try and make sure your baby is free to have a toddle when they get the urge (although make sure they are away from the stairs). Or instead of pushing them in their push chair, why not let them toddle along for a bit.