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Contributors

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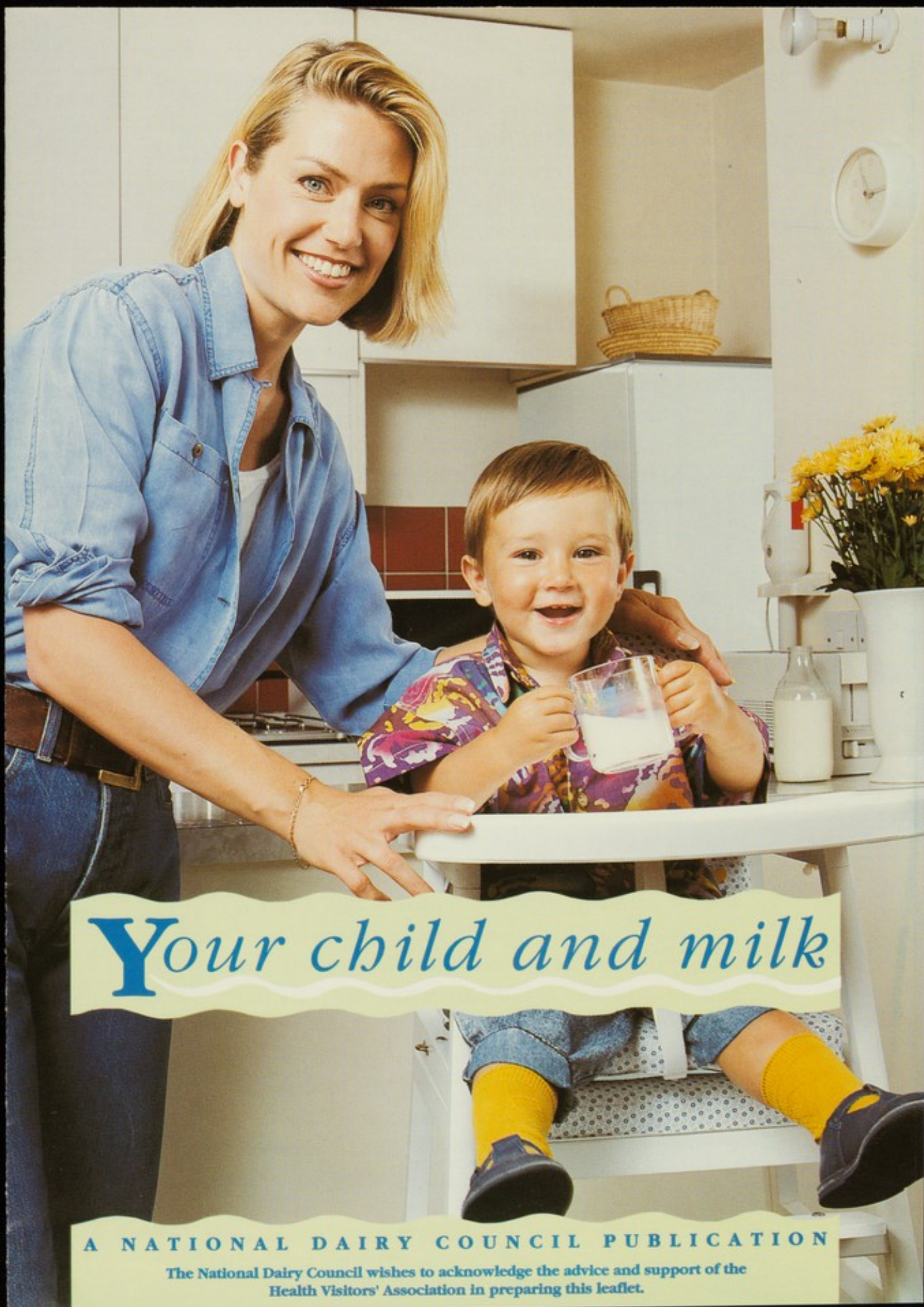
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Your child and milk

A NATIONAL DAIRY COUNCIL PUBLICATION

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As all mums know, weaning a baby onto solid foods can be frustrating, amusing, infuriating and, eventually rewarding. To add to the emotional strain at this time, there is often so much conflicting information about which foods to introduce to your baby and when, that the whole process can seem thoroughly confusing!

New guidelines have recently been published by the government. The National Dairy Council has produced this leaflet to help you understand some of the issues raised by the new guidelines and especially the role of cows' milk in your child's diet.

Cows' milk is one of the most complete foods available to us. It is a good source of energy and many nutrients such as protein, and a wide range of vitamins and minerals. It is especially important for calcium which is essential for growing bones and teeth and for riboflavin, a B vitamin.

For this reason, milk and dairy products such as yogurt and cheese, and foods made from them such as macaroni cheese, custard, and rice pudding can make a significant contribution to the weaning diet. Also, as emphasised in the new guidelines, these foods should continue to play an important part in the diet of toddlers and young children.

The majority of babies should not be given any solids before four months. Until this time breast milk or infant formula will provide all the nourishment your baby needs. But by six months, a mixed diet of milk feeds and puréed solids should be offered to all babies.



When Can Milk and Foods Made from Milk be Given?

After the age of four months, your baby can begin to have cows' milk-based foods, such as plain yogurt, custard and cheese sauce. And at six months you can also use cows' milk to mix baby cereal. At this stage, your baby should still be having breast milk or infant formula as a main drink.

Start to introduce a cup or beaker at six months, and encourage your baby to abandon the bottle by a year. A plastic cup or lidded feeder beaker will help prevent the type of damage to teeth which can result from prolonged use of bottles.

Before six months, drinks other than milk or water are not needed. In particular, drinks with added sugar can damage a baby's first teeth, especially if given in a bottle. Talk to your health visitor if you are considering using drinks other than milk or water.

As your baby begins to try a variety of different foods, it's often more convenient for a busy mum to provide her baby with small amounts of any milk-containing meal prepared for the rest of the family, but it's also much cheaper. And, after all, one of the main aims of weaning is to enable a baby to progress from getting all its nutrition from one food to eating a wide range of foods, which contribute to nutritional needs and enable the child to join in with family meals.

As babies develop, they begin to want to help feed themselves. This is the time when 'finger foods' become important, and the guidelines recommend cubes of cheese, along with cubes of fruit, vegetables, toast, soft meat and potato; a selection of which should be offered at each meal.

At about one year old, children can switch to whole cows' milk as the main drink. The aim is to provide the child with a minimum of 350ml a day (almost two-thirds of a pint) of whole milk. For children who won't drink milk, a minimum of two servings of dairy products each day is advised to make sure that the toddler is getting all the calcium he or she needs. For example, cheese, yogurt, fromage frais, cottage cheese, cheese spread, or foods such as custard, macaroni cheese, cauliflower cheese, or milky puddings.

By this age, most children should be using a cup or beaker for drinks, and milk or water should be the main drinks. Other drinks (which tend to contain sugar) should usually be restricted to meal times because of the risk to teeth, and should not be given in feeding bottles or at bedtime.



Which Type of Milk?

The type of cows' milk given, particularly as a drink, up until 2 years of age should be whole milk (silver top) as this has the extra calories and vitamins A and D that a young child needs.

From the age of two, semi-skimmed milk can be introduced as a main drink provided the child has a good appetite and eats a wide range of foods. Skimmed milk is not suitable for children under five - it's too low in calories and has none of the fat-soluble vitamins (A and D).

The following chart shows some of the nutrients in milk, and compares the different types.

What a pint of milk provides for toddlers (aged 1-3 years)

	Proportion of daily needs (%RNI)**		
	Whole Milk	Semi-Skimmed Milk	Skimmed Milk*
Calories			
Boys:	32	22	16
Girls:	33	23	17
Protein	129	134	134
Vitamin B2	167	177	177
Vitamin B12	460	460	480
Vitamin A	82	34	2
Vitamin D	2.6	0.9	-
Vitamin C	20	20	20
Calcium	192	198	202
Zinc	46	46	48
Iodine	126	126	126
Iron	4	4	4

* Skimmed milk is not suitable for children under the age of 5 years because of its low calorie content.

** The RNI is the Reference Nutrient Intake i.e. the quantity of a nutrient which is adequate (or more than adequate) for nearly all children in this age group.

Milk and Teeth

Unlike the sugars found in many other drinks, the sugar (lactose) in milk is not harmful to teeth. And the calcium in milk and other dairy products is also good for growing teeth. In particular, scientists believe that cheese may actually help protect teeth from decay and some dentists now recommend that children eat a small cube of cheese at the end of a meal, particularly if a sweet pudding has been eaten, to counteract harmful sugars in the other foods eaten.

The Question of Iron

Why Does My Baby Need Iron?

The need for extra iron is one of the reasons why, between four and six months, it is important to start to wean your baby onto solid foods. Breast milk or formula is no longer sufficient on its own. Your baby was born with an in-built iron store big enough to last for four to six months. Breast milk, like cows' milk, is fairly low in iron. But the iron in breast milk is efficiently used by your baby's system, making up for the small amount. For babies not receiving breast milk, formula milks are iron-fortified.

The main goal of weaning is to provide a good mixed diet, containing foods rich in iron which, together with breast milk (or formula) will provide the increasing amount of iron and other nutrients your baby needs.

Because babies of this age can only manage small amounts of food, although they may now be having three small meals, it is still important to continue with milk feeds. The new guidelines recommend that you continue with breast milk, or provide infant formula or, after six months, follow-on milk - both of which have added iron.

At the same time, it is important to be aware of the best sources of iron for your child and to understand the importance of establishing these foods in your child's diet during weaning, rather than just relying on infant formula for iron. This will also help your baby to progress to eating a proper balanced diet, and to join in with family meals.

On average, babies aged 7-12 months need about 6 milligrams of iron every day, although some will need up to 8 milligrams. For children aged 1-3 years, the average requirement is 5.3 milligrams per day and the RNI (the amount which will cover almost all children's needs) is 6.9 milligrams. So aim to include several iron-rich foods in your baby's diet each day.



Here are a few examples of sources of readily absorbed iron:

Food	Quantity	Iron Content (milligrams)
Liver	3 tablespoons (50g)	5.0
Liver Sausage or pâté*	1 small slice (10g)	0.6
Sardines (canned in tomato sauce)	2 sardines (50g)	2.3
Minced beef	3 tablespoons (50g)	1.6
Lamb	3 tablespoons (50g)	0.9
Fish fingers	2 fish fingers (60g)	0.9
Corned beef	1 very thin slice (30g)	0.9
Pork	3 tablespoons (50g)	0.7
Chicken	3 tablespoons (50g)	0.4
Sausage	1 small (20g)	0.3
Meat paste	Thinly spread on bread (10g)	0.2

* Not suitable for children under 1 year.

If you're vegetarian and do not want to feed your baby meat, here are some alternatives.

Foods	Quantity	Iron Content (milligrams)
Weetabix	1 Weetabix (20g)	1.5
Cornflakes/Rice Krispies	1 small bowl (20g)	1.3
Lentils, cooked	1 tablespoon (40g)	1.2
Egg	1 egg (50g)	1.0
Dried fruit (eg apricot, raisins, dates)	1 tablespoon (30g)	1.0-1.3
Wholemeal bread	1 slice (35g)	0.9
Baked beans (other cooked beans)	1 tablespoon (40g)	0.6
Avocado pear	Half	0.2
Green vegetables (eg beans, peas, courgette)	2 tablespoons (60g)	0.2-1.0

Unfortunately, the iron contained in non-meat foods is not as easily absorbed and used by the body but, by also including a food or drink rich in vitamin C with each meal, you can make sure that your baby's body is making the most of the iron he or she eats. Try orange or blackcurrant juice, a tomato, or a few orange or satsuma segments. Don't give young children tea or coffee with their meals as this reduces iron absorption.

Many baby foods are fortified with iron, for example:

Baby Foods	Quantity	Typical Iron Content (milligrams)
Rusk	1 large rusk	2.5-3.0
Iron-fortified jars of baby food	Stage 1: a jar	2.5
	Stage 2: a jar	3.5
Unfortified jars	Stage 1: a jar	1.0
	Stage 2: a jar	1.3

Look at the labels to see which products contain iron.

More detailed information on weaning can be obtained from your Health Visitor, Baby Clinic or the National Dairy Council's qualified dietitians. Write to the National Dairy Council, 5-7 John Princes Street, London W1M 0AP.



National Dairy Council