

Weaning (spoon feeding) for Babies with a Cleft Involving the Palate



When do I start weaning to solid foods?

Your baby is ready to start eating solid foods at the same time as babies without a cleft.

If your baby is having difficulty with bottles, or requires supplementary tube feeds, please contact your Cleft Team/Speech & Language Therapist before offering spoon feeds.

Signs that your baby is ready for spoon feeding:

- Baby should be around 6 months old (as per World Health Organization) **and**
- Holding head up, sitting upright with little support
- Grasping at objects and putting hands in mouth
- Showing interest in food during family meal times
- Not fully satisfied with bottle feeds, demanding extra bottle feeds over a few days



Should I wait until the palate is fully repaired? NO - nutritional needs are not met by milk alone after 6 months of age. A key developmental stage for accepting different textures may be missed.

How do I start?

- Choose a time when you're free and your baby is not too hungry. Offer the spoon feed before a bottle feed, prioritizing savoury over sweet flavours.
- Create a calm atmosphere by switching off mobile phones, devices etc.
- Sit your baby upright and safely strapped into a chair.
- Smile and talk to your baby, face-to-face, during the feed so that baby is relaxed and happy.
- Start with 1 or 2 teaspoons once or twice a day, offered from a small baby spoon. A shallow spoon may work best, placing it at the tip of your baby's mouth to begin with. Never put solid food into your baby's bottle.
- If your baby refuses the spoon or gets upset try again the next day.
- If your baby refuses a new food/taste this does not mean they will never like it. Babies may need a new food offered many times (10-20 times) before they like it.



General Tips for feeding a baby with a cleft

- ✓ Don't worry if food goes up through the cleft and comes down the nose. This is normal before the palate repair and is not harmful. Your baby may sneeze to clear their nose. If food appears to get 'stuck' in the cleft just offer a little water to drink which should clear and clean the cleft.
- ✓ It's ok to get messy as children learn about food by playing with it, feeling it and smelling it.
- ✓ Praise your baby for eating or playing with their food.
- ✓ Leave cleaning their face (mouth & nose) until the end of the meal and do not wipe the mouth after each spoon.

STOP Stop if your baby closes their mouth, pulls away from the spoon or pushes the spoon away. Do not force the feed.

- ✓ If your baby is refusing spoon feeds you can call your cleft team for support.
- ✓ Feed your baby with the rest of the family at mealtimes.
- ✓ From 6 months of age a cup/beaker can be introduced for supplementary drinks of water or milk. See our separate leaflet on [changing from bottles to cups](#).



*Baby-led weaning: You can use this approach, as with any baby, and move onto different textures as appropriate. It is important for your baby to be accepting spoon feeds as part of their diet before the palate repair as pureed & soft textures are recommended following surgery.

Where can I get more information on weaning?

- General information on www.hse.ie and www.bordbia.ie and www.mychild.ie (Search under 'weaning')
- Advice from your Public Health Nurse, GP, Cleft Team

Author: Jane Gunn, Cleft CNS

Contributions: Celine Lenihan, Claire O'Kane, SLTs

Approval date: July 2026 (Version 2)

Revision date: July 2029

Information correct at time of print

