

Child Friendly Guidelines: Early Years

These nutritional guidelines have been put together by Registered Dietitians from Centrepoint to provide an optional resource for staff and volunteers running IFAN food banks and other food aid providers when possible. They are evidence-based and could be used to support beneficiaries to receive a nutritionally balanced parcel of food which takes individual needs such as health conditions, culture and kitchen facilities into account.

Feeding Babies:

The **WHO** and **UK Department of Health** recommend babies **only have breastmilk or formula milk until 6 months of age**, as this provides all of the nutrition and hydration they need to grow and develop.

From around 6 months of age foods can be introduced **in addition to breast or formula milk**. This is known as **complimentary feeding or weaning**.

Formula Milk:

Food banks have been advised **not to distribute infant formula** or other infant milks because of safety concerns, but should **contact their local health visitor, children's centre or social services** for immediate support and further information for those in urgent need.

Go to UNICEF website for more information: [UNICEF](#) [Local authority guide](#)

Healthy Start and Best Start:

Young pregnant women (under 18) and pregnant women or families with children under 4 years of age in England (or 3 years of age in Scotland) in certain low income households can access either the [NHS Healthy Start scheme](#) (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or the [Best Start Foods scheme](#) in Scotland. This [First Steps Nutrition resource](#) can be offered to beneficiaries for information about the schemes as well as recipes.



Baby food:

Infants should continue with breastfeeding or formula milk alongside solid foods.

Babies don't need special baby foods and can be offered **simple, minimally processed foods which can be mashed or served as finger food**. It is recommended that **vegetable and savoury tastes are given first**. Babies **don't need very soft foods** such as purees if they are given solids from about 6 months as they will be able to swallow effectively and manage foods in the mouth with practice. Commercial baby foods are **expensive, sweet, very soft and often low in nutritional value**, therefore some food banks choose not to stock them. In cases where the family have very limited cooking equipment and safety may be an issue, you may wish to offer them. From 1 year of age children should eat healthy family foods and don't need commercial products.

The following questions may be useful to ask the beneficiary, if you have the ability to further tailor their parcel:

- How old are your children? *Guidelines cover infants, under 5s, children and teens.*
- Are there any foods that you or your family don't like or don't eat?
- Do you or any of your family have any special food requirements? *E.g. allergies, vegetarian, halal. Refer to other guidelines for more information.*
- Which cooking facilities do you have available? *In cases where there are limited or no cooking facilities you may wish to offer commercial baby foods.*
- Would you like Baby Food Recipes? *These detail how to safely make baby foods from tinned products.*



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The following food items would all be good options for a family with infants or children under 5 at home, try to include some from each group:

Carbohydrate-rich foods:

- Grains like rice, quinoa, couscous, polenta, millet flour, oats
- Pasta and noodles
- Fortified breakfast cereals (no added sugar) e.g. Weetabix, ready brek, porridge
- Breadsticks, rice cakes, crackers
- Bread products (pittas)
- Microwave packs of grains/pulses (check salt)

Fruits and vegetables:

- Any tinned vegetables (in water)
- Tinned fruit (in water or juice)
- Tomato/garlic/ginger paste
- Tinned tomatoes

Offer fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables if any are available

Protein-rich foods:

- Tinned fish not in sauce (e.g. tuna)
- Tinned beans (e.g. butter beans, chickpeas) in water
- Dried pulses (e.g. lentils, beans)
- Nut butter and ground nuts (without added salt or sugar)
- Tofu (long life)

Dairy and alternatives:

- UHT Milk (whole as the main milk drink from age 1, whole or semi-skimmed from age 2)
- Unsweetened fortified milk alternatives (suitable from age 1) – do not give rice milk to under 5s due to arsenic content
- Dried milk powder (to add to food, not as the main milk drink)

Other items to include:

Ask the family if they need oil, flour and seasonings. Salt and sugar should not be added to babies food, and honey is not safe for babies to eat. Don't give foods such as biscuits, chocolate and crisps to babies. The only drinks babies and young children need are milk and water – don't provide juice, squash or sugary drinks for children under 5.

If you have access to fresh or frozen food you could also add:

If you are able to provide fresh vegetables and fruit, these are ideal for making baby food. Any fresh or frozen plain fruits, vegetables, fish or meat are good choices. Bread, dairy products without added sugar, eggs and fresh starchy tubers (e.g. potato, yam) are also great choices.

An example 3 day food parcel suitable for an infant or child under 5:

- 1 pack of porridge/Ready Brek
- 1 pack of pasta or plain noodles
- 1 pack of rice or couscous
- 3 tins of plain beans
- 2 tins of fruit in water/juice
- 3 tins of vegetables in water
- 1 tins of tomatoes
- 1 pack of lentils
- 2 cartons of milk (dairy or plant alternative)
- 3 tins of fish/meat (not in sauce)
- 1 pack of breadsticks or rice cakes
- Fresh/frozen products if available

The following recipe cards offer very simple ideas for babies around 6 months of age:

- Fruit mash
- Vegetable mash
- Bean mash

For more great recipes for infants and children under 5 go to:

[First Steps Nutrition](#)

[Start4Life weaning](#)

[Change4Life](#)