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la vie



# Baby Discovers Food

Parents' Guide - How to Prepare  
and Offer Baby's First Foods,  
Ages 6 Months+

## Evolution of baby's food needs

### Between 0 and 6 months

#### Breastfeeding is best.

Breastmilk meets baby's needs while promoting growth and development. Breastfed babies should be given a vitamin D supplement.

If you can't always breastfeed, you can give baby expressed breastmilk. Otherwise, commercial infant formulas are the only appropriate substitutes. But they must be prepared safely, following the recommendations.

Baby doesn't need any other food or drink.



### Around 6 months

Baby is ready to discover food!

### Between 6 and 12 months

In addition to breastmilk, foods with various textures are gradually introduced into baby's diet.

- Continue breastfeeding on demand.
  - › Breastmilk is still the staple of baby's nutrition until 12 months.
- Offer foods that are rich in iron at least twice a day:
  - › Iron-enriched cereal for babies, meat, poultry, fish, beans/legumes, tofu and eggs.
- As soon as baby starts eating, offer foods with varied textures:
  - › Smooth or lumpy purees, big soft pieces, etc.
- Offer each food separately at first to let baby discover its real flavour.
- As soon as you start introducing foods, you should also offer foods with a higher risk of being allergenic.
- Serve small quantities of water at mealtimes in an open cup. Make sure to help baby at first.

Once baby has been eating iron-rich foods twice a day for several days:

- Gradually introduce other foods:
  - › Vegetables and fruits, grain products, cheese and yogourt (minimum 2% MF).
  - › Cow's milk with 3.25% MF can be introduced gradually between the ages of 9 and 12 months in addition to breastmilk or formula.

Fruit juice and other sweet drinks are not advised. They provide a lot of energy but do not satisfy hunger. And, they promote cavities.



Unprocessed foods are perfectly suited to babies' needs, when given in addition to breastmilk or formula. Transformed foods and drinks are often less nutritious and more expensive. Some types of toddler milks are not recommended for little ones.

### Around 7 months

Depending on hunger and interest, baby eats about 3 small meals a day. A snack can also be offered.

### Around 9 months

Baby eats about 3 small meals and 1 or 2 snacks, according to hunger and interest.

### As of 12 months

Baby has a more regular schedule for meals and snacks and eats with the family.

- Continue breastfeeding until age 2, or as long as the mother and baby desire.
  - › Keep giving a vitamin D supplement to breastfed babies, even when they are eating a variety of foods.
- Offer babies the same nutritious foods as the rest of the family, leaving out any added salt and sugar.
- Serve iron-rich food at every meal.
- You can offer cow's milk with 3.25% MF.
  - › Limit the amount of cow's milk to 3 cups (750 ml) per day.
  - › Cow's milk with 2% MF and plain enriched soy beverages can be offered starting at age 2. Other plant-based drinks do not meet the needs of little ones. They should be offered only occasionally.



## When to introduce food

**Baby is ready to eat at around 6 months.**

Wait until baby shows signs of being ready before offering foods in addition to breastmilk. Baby must be at least 4 months old; otherwise, the digestive system isn't developed enough yet.

**Here are the signs of babies being ready to try food**



✓ They can stay sitting up in a high chair without help.

✓ They can hold up and control their head.

✓ They are able to push away a spoon with their hand and turn their head away.

✓ They may also try to grab foods and bring them to their mouth.

**For premature babies, you should use their adjusted age, based on their due date. Their body will then be developed enough for food.**

**For baby's first food experiences, choose a time when baby is feeling well and in a good mood.**

It's a good idea to wait until after a restful nap.

## Managing the risk of food allergies

Some foods are more likely to cause allergies.

**Here are the main foods that can trigger allergies (allergenic foods):**

- Peanuts
- Wheat and triticale
- Seafood (shellfish)
- Sesame seeds
- Cow's milk
- Mustard
- Nuts
- Eggs
- Fish
- Soy



**You can introduce allergenic foods at the same time as other foods. Here's how:**

- 1 Offer one new allergenic food at a time.
- 2 Offer the same food for 3 days before offering a new one. This will make it easier to identify the cause if baby has an allergic reaction.
- 3 Once allergenic foods have been successfully introduced, keep offering these foods every week. This will help baby's body get used to the food and decrease the risk of developing an allergy later on.

**Make sure baby stays awake for 2 hours after eating an allergenic food, so you can watch for the appearance of allergy symptoms.**

**Here are a few possible allergy symptoms:**

- Swelling of the face, lips or tongue
- Hives, welts or rash on the body
- Sudden crying and irritability
- Difficulty swallowing and breathing; noisy breathing
- Projectile vomiting, recurring diarrhea

**Call 911 if baby has several of these symptoms or if baby seems to have trouble breathing.**

Allergy symptoms usually appear quickly after eating an allergenic food. However, a reaction can be triggered up to 2 hours after eating.

If you think baby may be showing food allergy symptoms, stop giving the food you suspect and see your doctor.



# Decrease the risks of choking and food poisoning

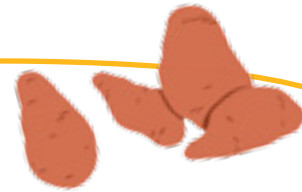
Not all foods are suitable for little ones. Here's how to offer these foods to lower their risk:

## Fruits



- Wash under running water
  - › Using a brush, scrub fruits that have a thick skin (like watermelon)
- Remove the skins, seeds and pits
- Fruit should be soft (e.g. banana), grated (e.g. apple), cut in small pieces (e.g. melon), pureed or cooked until soft
  - › Pineapple must be cut very small to break the fibres

## Vegetables



- Wash under running water
  - › With a brush, scrub vegetables that have a thick skin (like carrots and potatoes)
- Cook hard and crunchy vegetables until soft
  - › Celery must be cut very small to break the fibres
- Chop leafy vegetables like spinach and cabbage before adding them to a recipe

## Fish and seafood

- Avoid fresh and frozen tuna, canned pale tuna, shark, swordfish, marlin, orange roughy, snoek, large-mouth bass, pike, pickerel, musky and lake trout, because they all have a high mercury content
- Cook thoroughly
  - › Avoid smoked fish and seafood
  - › See our article on safe cooking temperatures: [foundationolo.ca/cookingtemperature](https://www.foundationolo.ca/cookingtemperature)
- Remove bones



## Meat and poultry

- Cook thoroughly
  - › See our article on safe cooking temperatures: [foundationolo.ca/cookingtemperature](https://www.foundationolo.ca/cookingtemperature)
- Remove bones

## Avoid:

- Honey, until baby is 1 year old.
- Hard, small, round or smooth and sticky foods, e.g., popcorn, hard candy, cough drops, jujubes, chewing gum, ice cubes, and foods served on skewers or toothpicks, until baby is 4 years old.



## Round foods

- Cut into quarters or slice lengthwise
  - › E.g. grapes, cherry tomatoes, sausage, cheese strings (e.g. Ficello)

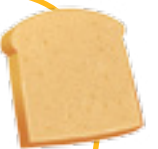
## Chickpeas and beans

- Crush



## Bread

- Toast



## Vegetable shoots and sprouts

- Cook thoroughly
  - › E.g. alfalfa sprouts, radish sprouts, lentil sprouts, clover sprouts, bean sprouts

## Fruit juice

- Fruit juices are not recommended. If offered, choose pasteurized juice

## Dried fruit

- Chop and add to recipes that will be cooked

## Cow's milk

- Offer pasteurized milk with 3.25% MF



## Nuts and peanuts

- Use ground (powdered) nuts and peanuts
- ..... OR .....
- Choose creamy nut butters
- Spread a thin layer on a salt-free cracker or on toast, for example



## Eggs

- Cook thoroughly
  - › The yolk should be hard
- ..... OR .....
- Use pasteurized liquid eggs for recipes that don't involve cooking



Small children are more at risk of choking until they are 4 years old. To reduce those risks, it's important to watch your child carefully while they are eating. Limit distractions and make sure baby stays calm and sitting properly on a chair. Adults are also encouraged to take first aid classes to know what to do in case baby chokes.

## Cooking food for baby

### 1 Preparing food

#### Vegetables and fruits

**Fresh:** Wash, peel and cut vegetables and fruits. Remove the core, seeds and pits where needed.

**Frozen:** Choose frozen fruits and vegetables without added salt or sugar.

**Canned:** Choose canned foods without added salt or sugar. Thoroughly rinse food with water.

#### Meat and poultry

Remove skin and visible fat. Remove bones (this is easier to do after cooking).

**Avoid smoked meats, lunch meats, sausage, ham and seasoned meats.**

#### Fish

Choose fish without breading and without added salt or sugar. Remove the skin. Remove all the bones (this is easier to do after cooking).

#### Tofu

Choose firm, extra firm or medium firm tofu. Give preference to plain tofu. Rinse with water.

**Silken tofu is less nutritious.**

#### Beans and legumes

**Canned:** Choose canned foods without added salt. Thoroughly rinse beans with water.

**Dried:** Soak and cook according to the instructions on the package. Rinse well with water after cooking.

#### Avoid:

- Ultra-processed foods that have a long list of ingredients, which tend to have a lot of added salt and sugar. E.g. store-bought pizza, lunch meats and transformed meats, chips, cake and sweet drinks.
- Reduced-fat foods or foods with artificial sweeteners (sucralose or Splenda, aspartame, etc.). E.g. yogourt with less than 2% MF, light cheeses.



### 2 Cooking food



Do not add any salt or sugar to let baby discover foods' real flavours.

For foods that need cooking or are not soft enough.

#### Steam vegetables and fruits:

1. Place prepared food in a metal steamer or colander.
2. Place the steamer over a pan of water and bring water to a boil over medium-high heat.
3. Steam the food until it can easily be crushed with a fork.

#### Boil meat, poultry and fish:

1. Place the prepared food into a pan.
2. Cover with a bit of water.
3. Cook over medium heat until the food is completely cooked and comes apart easily with a fork.

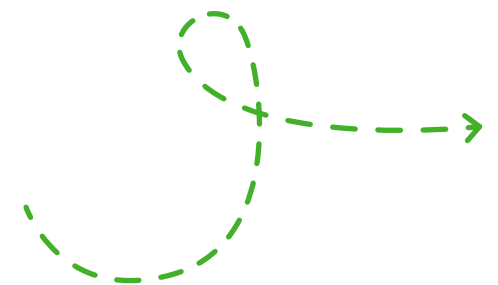
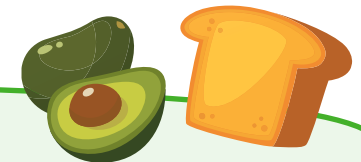


#### Test the softness of food served in pieces

- **For soft foods** like cooked carrots, cooked apples, avocados, etc.
  - › Crush the food between your thumb and forefinger.
- **For dry foods** like a cracker, a piece of toast, etc.
  - › Put the food in your mouth and see if you can make it fall apart using saliva and crushing it with your tongue.

#### Test the temperature

Babies can eat lukewarm or cold foods, depending on what they prefer. Take care to carefully stir any warmed-up food before giving it to your baby, to make sure the heat is distributed evenly. Check that it is the right temperature by touching the food to the inside of your wrist.



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## Process food to the desired texture

You don't have to wait for your baby to have teeth to offer food cut into pieces. Expose your baby to a variety of food textures as soon as they start eating. That will make it easier for your baby to accept food served at family meals around age 1.

Around 6 months

As soon as baby starts eating



Smooth puree

Puree the food in a blender or with a hand blender until a smooth puree is reached. Add a little cooking liquid or breastmilk if needed.



Chunky puree

Crush food with a fork. Add a little cooking liquid or breastmilk to get the desired texture.



Big soft pieces

Cut the food into big pieces that baby can pick up with their hands. The food should be longer than baby's fist: about the length of your finger.

Around 9 months

As soon as baby picks things up with their fingers



Small soft pieces

Cut the food into small pieces that baby can pick up with their fingers.

Serve purees with a spoon OR spread on another food like an unsalted cracker that baby can pick up and eat by themself.

Place food pieces in front of baby and let them eat by themself.

## Develop your baby's independence

When they start eating, some babies want to grab foods and bring them to their mouth. Others prefer to open their mouth for a spoon held by a grownup.

As the parents, you're the experts on your baby. So, it's up to you to determine which strategy works best to help your baby explore food, depending on the interest they show. The important thing is to be sensitive to your baby's needs and encourage their development. This is how you help baby get ready to eat the same meals as the rest of the family at around the age of 12 months.



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## What is baby-led weaning (BLW) or self-feeding?

This is an approach to introducing foods in which babies feed themselves as soon as they start eating, at 6 months. They bring all the foods to their mouth by themselves. Even purees! If you're interested in BLW, read up on it and consult nutritionists or other health professionals who are specialized in BLW to make sure this approach is right for your baby.

### There is no single "best" method:

**For babies who want to eat by themselves:** Offer foods they can pick up with their hands. Also expose your baby to smooth textures by dipping a spoon in puree and letting baby bring it to their mouth. You can also put a smooth puree on another food, like an unsalted cracker or biscuit

**For babies who don't eat by themselves:** Offer food by spoon, following the baby's hunger signals. Also, put a few bigger food pieces on baby's tray so they can explore them at their own pace.

**Babies don't only explore foods with their mouth. Let them explore with all their senses. Little messes are part of the learning process!**



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Never put food pieces in your baby's mouth. Let baby do it. They know what size of food is acceptable and where to position it inside the mouth to avoid choking.

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## Storing food

Baby food prepared at home must be served immediately or refrigerated for later. That way, bacteria won't have time to multiply.

After meals, throw out all the food that was offered to baby. To reduce waste, give small quantities at a time in a bowl. If baby is still hungry, you can add more using a clean spoon.



Any food that has stayed out at room temperature for over 2 hours should be thrown out.



### Storage time



Puree







Pieces

 In the fridge

 In the freezer

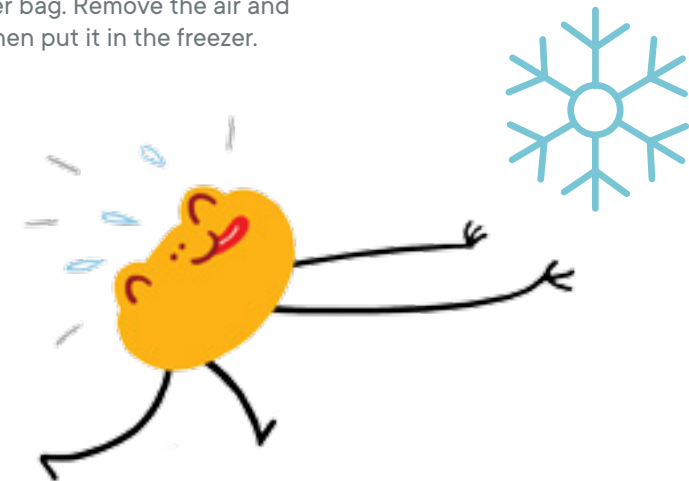


				
Cooked vegetables and fruits	2 to 3 days	2 to 3 months	2 to 3 days	6 to 8 months
Cooked meats	1 to 2 days	1 to 2 months	3 to 4 days	2 to 3 months
Cooked poultry	1 to 2 days	1 to 2 months	3 to 4 days	4 to 6 months
Cooked fish	1 to 2 days	1 to 2 months	2 to 3 days	1 to 2 months
Cooked beans and legumes	5 days	3 months	5 days	3 months
Tofu	6 to 7 days	1 to 2 months	6 to 7 days Keep in water and change water every 2 days.	1 to 2 months
Cooked eggs	—	—	7 days	—
Food combinations	1 to 2 days	1 to 2 months	3 to 4 days	About 3 months

### How to freeze food

- Right after you prepare the food, put it in small, resealable containers.
  - Put purees into an ice cube tray and cover it with plastic film.
- Write the name of the food and a "use by" date on the container.
- Put the food containers in the refrigerator.
- Once the food is cool, put it in the freezer.
  - For purees frozen in an ice cube tray, remove the cubes from the tray after 8 to 12 hours. Put the cubes in a freezer bag. Remove the air and carefully seal the bag. Then put it in the freezer.

 **Caution**  
Never re-freeze food that has previously been frozen!





## Everyone has a part to play to help baby eat healthy!

### Baby chooses

#### How much? The quantity of food

Baby decides how much food to eat, according to hunger. Baby can even decide not to eat at all.

In those first meals, baby will probably eat very little. One teaspoon (5 ml) will probably be enough. You can gradually increase the amount given, according to baby's interest. Don't hesitate to give baby more food if they seem to want more. But don't force baby to eat if they don't seem hungry.

#### Some signs your baby is hungry:

##### Before a meal, baby...

- ✔ brings their hands to their mouth
- ✔ wants to nurse and makes sucking motions
- ✔ waves their arms and legs when seeing food
- ✔ tries to grab food and bring it to their mouth
- ✔ is grumpy and irritable

##### During the meal, baby...

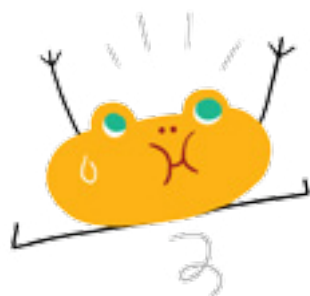
- ✔ looks at the person giving the food
- ✔ stays focused on the food

! During the first months, baby decides when, where and how much milk to drink. The parent only decides the type of milk to give baby.

#### Some signs your baby is no longer hungry:

##### Baby...

- ✔ doesn't seem interested in the food
- ✔ turns away and closes their mouth
- ✔ pushes the spoon away or throws it
- ✔ plays or falls asleep



Several factors influence hunger: the food eaten before, a growth spurt, physical activity, fever, illness, etc. Your role as the parent is to respect all of your baby's hunger signals and to encourage baby to listen to those signals.

✔ Children learn through imitation. Be a good role model for your little one. Set the example by behaving the way you want them to behave.

### Parents decide

#### What? The family menu

Offer a variety of nutritious foods adapted for babies. Choose foods without added salt or sugar for your little ones.

For instance, offer baby some of the cooked carrots being served to the whole family. At around 1 year, baby will be able to eat the same menu as the whole family.

#### When? Mealtimes

Establish a routine, offering meals and snacks at around the same times of day, about every 3 to 4 hours.

The mealtime routine includes preparing the meal, setting the table, setting up the high chair, washing hands, etc.

Sometimes it takes several tries before baby likes a food. This is part of food discovery. Be patient, and be a good example, even if it takes over 15 times before baby accepts a food.



#### Where? Where to eat

Choose a place that's appropriate for meals. Get into the habit of eating in the kitchen or dining room. Give baby a place at the table even if not eating the same meal.

#### How? Mealtimes environment

Share meals in a calm, distraction-free atmosphere.

Turn off the TV and put phones and toys away. Also avoid pressuring, bribing and negotiating to encourage your little one to eat during meals. This will only make mealtimes tense.

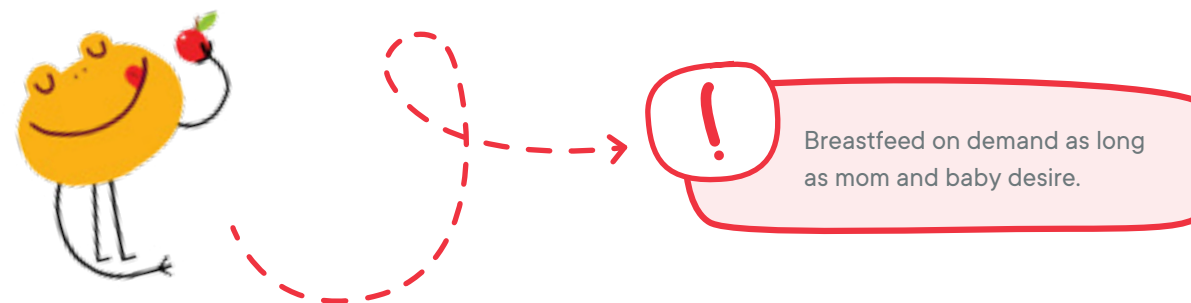




## Sample menus for baby

To inspire you, here are some examples of meals you can offer to your baby. Choose foods according to the seasons and in line with your eating habits. You'll find other sample menus on [fondationolo.ca](http://fondationolo.ca).

Since every child is unique, your little one might move from one stage to the next faster or slower than indicated here.



	Around 6 months	Around 7 months	Around 10 months	12 months and over
<b>Upon waking</b>	Breastmilk	Breastmilk	Breastmilk	Breastmilk
	Breastmilk	Breastmilk	<b>Crepe</b> (half flour, half iron-enriched cereal) with a thin layer of creamy peanut butter	<b>Oatmeal</b> (half oats, half iron-enriched cereal for babies)
<b>Breakfast</b>	Iron-enriched cereal for babies	Iron-enriched cereal for babies Big soft pieces of peeled pear	Orange wedges with the peel on Breastmilk	Half banana Cow's milk (3.25% MF)
<b>Morning snack</b>	Breastmilk	Breastmilk	Breastmilk	Water Pieces of seedless watermelon
	Breastmilk	Breastmilk Egg in an omelette <b>Squash puree</b>	Fusilli with canned light tuna Tomato wedges Sliced peeled peach Breastmilk	Sauteed tofu, carrots and zucchini Rice Apple, peeled and grated Cow's milk (3.25% MF)
<b>Afternoon snack</b>	Breastmilk	Breastmilk	Plain 2% MF yogurt Water	Pita Plain hummus Water
	Breastmilk <b>Chicken puree</b>	Breastmilk <b>Fish puree</b> Big soft pieces of carrot	Breastmilk Barley Well-cooked pieces of broccoli <b>Turkey meatballs</b> made with iron-enriched cereal for babies Applesauce	Breastmilk <b>Asian-style macaroni</b> Green peas Grapes cut into quarters
<b>Supper</b>				
<b>Before bed</b>	Breastmilk	Breastmilk	Breastmilk	Breastmilk



## Acknowledgements and additional sources

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### Additional sources and references

- Institut national de santé publique du Québec. (2022). [From Tiny Tot to Toddler.](#)
- Health Canada. (March 2021). Canada's food guide. [Healthy Eating for Parents and Children.](#)
- Health Canada. (January 2015). [Nutrition for Healthy Term Infants: Recommendations From Six to 24 Months.](#)

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Do you want more tips and tools to guide your baby toward healthy eating and to get a great start in life? Check out [fondationolo.ca/blog](https://fondationolo.ca/blog)





## Food suggestions

Here's a list of foods to offer your little one.

You don't have to introduce all these foods quickly. Go according to your own eating habits and food availability.



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## Other foods

When baby is eating iron-rich foods at least twice a day.

### Vegetables

- Avocado
- Beet
- Broccoli
- Carrot
- Mushroom
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Squash
- Zucchini
- Spinach
- Corn
- Sweet potato
- Potato
- Green peas
- Bell pepper
- Rutabaga
- Tomato

### Fruits

- Pineapple
- Banana
- Blueberries
- Clementine
- Strawberries
- Raspberries
- Kiwi
- Mango
- Melon
- Orange
- Pear
- Apple
- Peach
- Plum
- Grapes

### Milk and substitutes

- Firm cheeses (e.g. cheddar and mozzarella)
- Fresh cheeses (e.g. cottage cheese and ricotta)
- Plain yogourt (2% MF or more)
- Cow's milk (3.25% MF, as of 9 months)
- Plain, enriched soy beverages (as of 2 years)

### Grain products

Give preference to whole-grain products

- Rolled oats (oatmeal)
- Millet
- Pasta
- Barley
- Quinoa
- Bulgur
- Bread
- Couscous
- Rice

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## Foods that are rich in iron

### Iron-enriched baby cereal

Offer it as a cereal or use it in different recipes, from 6 months and until baby is 2 years old.

- Barley
- Oat
- Wheat
- Rice

### Protein foods

Except milk and substitutes

- Lamb
- Ground peanuts or peanut butter
- Beef
- Shrimp
- Turkey
- Edamame and soy
- Beans (white, red, black, etc.)
- Lentils (red, green, etc.)
- Ground nuts and seeds, or nut/seed butter
- Eggs
- Chickpeas
- Chicken
- Pork
- Salmon
- Sole
- Canned light tuna
- Firm tofu
- Trout
- Horse meat
- Veal

**Offering a wide variety of foods will allow your baby to discover all kinds of flavours and make family meals easier!**