After stage 3 weaning, what's next?

By the time babies reach their first birthday, they are likely becoming more independent eaters and enjoying a wide variety of foods. Many will be well-established on three meals a day, with solid food now providing most of their energy and nutrients, rather than milk.

At this stage, you can introduce mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks to help top up energy and essential nutrients between meals. Snacks should be nutrient-dense rather than just filling - think fruit, vegetable sticks, dairy, wholegrain options and unprocessed proteins rather than processed snacks that are often higher in sugar or salt.

Milk and drinks after 12 months

After 12 months, if the child is eating well and accepting a varied diet, parents may choose to transition from formula or breast milk to cow's milk as a drink. This is a personal choice, and preferences should always be discussed with parents or carers.

From 12 months onwards, it's important to serve all drinks, including milk, from an open cup or a free-flow beaker rather than a bottle. This helps protect teeth from decay and supports oral motor development.

Milk remains an important source of nutrients, but too much can reduce a toddler's appetite for solid foods. To ensure they are still getting enough nutrition from their meals, limit milk intake to approximately 350–400ml per day.

Encouraging self-feeding and cutlery use

At this age children are still developing their self-feeding skills, so offering appropriately sized toddler cutlery can help them practice scooping, stabbing, and bringing food to their mouths. However, it's completely normal for some children to prefer eating with their hands at this age - it's often faster and easier for them!

Encourage the use of cutlery by continuing to offer it at each meal, even if a child only plays with it at first. Making cutlery fun, using role modelling, and offering praise when they try using it can support their learning.

Supporting feeding skills and independence

Finger foods continue to be a great way to encourage self-feeding, independence, and oral motor development. Including chopped-up pieces and chunkier bites helps toddlers practice chewing and strengthens the muscles needed for speech.

If some children take longer to adapt to solid foods, don't worry - food refusal is normal, and many toddlers go through phases of picky eating or hesitancy with new foods.

We want mealtimes to be enjoyable and stress-free. The best way to achieve this is by respecting each child's pace, avoiding pressure, and continuing to expose them to a wide variety of foods without expectation.

Every child develops feeding skills at their own rate, and by role modelling enjoyment of food, being patient, and making mealtimes a positive experience, we can help them build confidence in eating in their own time.

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