



Weaning and the Introduction of Cow’s Milk into Infant’s Diet

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The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) recommends that weaning should begin close to 6 months (26 weeks) of age. It is safe to give solid food to infants at 4 months (17 weeks) of age but not before this. Cow’s milk should not be offered as a main milk drink until the infant is over one year old, however small amounts of pasteurised full fat cow’s milk can be used in the preparation of weaning foods.¹ The aims of this study were to assess the age at which infants were weaned and to examine the reasons why they were weaned at this age. Another aim was to assess cow’s milk use in infants approximately 9 months old.

Women were asked at approximately 9 months postpartum ‘at what age did you introduce solids?’, ‘at what age do you think solids should be introduced?’, ‘why did you introduce solids at this age?’, and ‘how much cow’s milk do you give your baby?’. Weight and height of the women were also measured and BMI was calculated.

The mean age was 32.4 ± 4.8 years (*n* = 328) and 43.6 % were nulliparous. The mean weight was 69.6 ± 14.7 kg and the mean BMI was 25.3 ± 5.1 kg/m², with 17.1 % obese. Women answered the questions at 39.8 ± 3.6 weeks postpartum. Women introduced solids at 20.2 ± 5.0 weeks and believed that solids should be introduced at 20.9 ± 5.9 weeks. The reasons why solids were introduced at this time are shown in table 1. Of the 295 women, 24 % had introduced cow’s milk at nine months, with a mean daily provision of 21.8mls (range 2.5 to 800mls).

Table 1. Why did you introduce solids at this age? (*n* = 295)

	Number	%
Because it was the right time	106	35.9
To make my baby sleep	1	0.3
To stop my baby waking up	2	0.7
Because my baby was hungry	51	17.3
Because my baby was looking up and showing interest in food	121	41.0
Because my baby was chewing their fist	2	0.7
Because my baby was a big baby	2	0.7
None of the above	10	3.4

In this study women introduced solids earlier than recommended, mainly prompted by their child’s developing interest in food. This may suggest that weaning recommendations are not being effectively communicated or implemented.

¹FSAI (2011) Best Practice for Infant Feeding in Ireland. From pre-conception through the first year of an infant’s life A guide for healthcare professionals based on The Scientific Recommendations for a National Infant Feeding Policy, 2nd Edition (2011). ISBN 1-904465-89-7.

