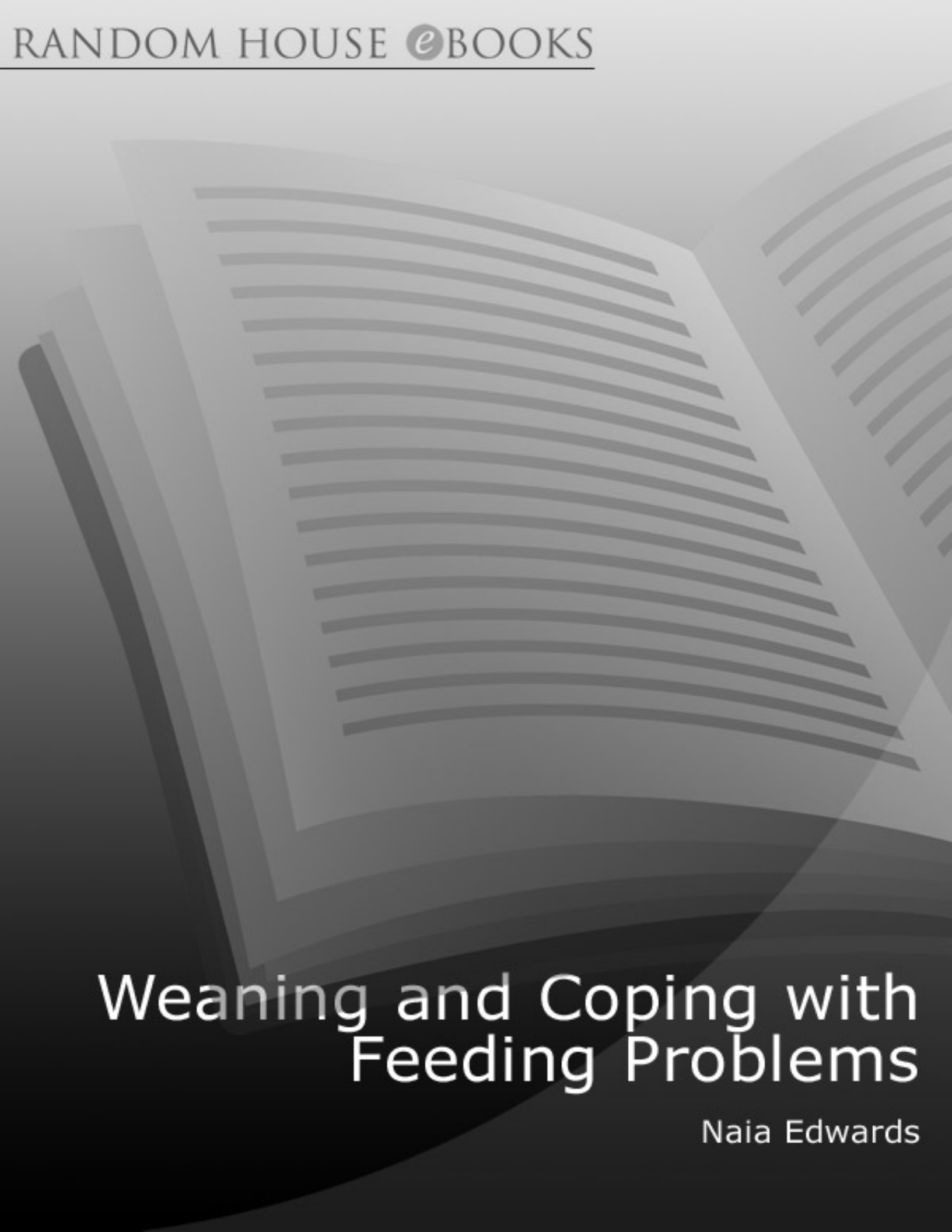


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# Weaning and Coping with Feeding Problems

Naia Edwards

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# Weaning and Coping with Feeding Problems

**an easy-to-follow guide**

**Naia Edwards**

 **vermilion**

# Introduction

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For the first few months of your baby's life the only food she needs is breast milk or formula milk. But by the time your baby is about six months old she starts to need some solid food in her diet. This process of moving your baby from a milk-only diet to a mixed diet of milk and solid food is called weaning. It is a gradual process which requires patience, trial and error, and a sense of humour!

Weaning your baby is an exciting time as well as a messy one! For some mothers it can be quite an emotional and worrying time too. You want your baby to have the best start to a healthy diet but there are so many questions. When should you start weaning? What foods should you provide? How should you prepare the food? How do you know if your baby is getting enough food? This book is designed to guide you through the weaning process, with helpful tips and straightforward advice carefully explaining the different stages to make weaning an enjoyable and healthy experience for both you and your baby. *Bon Appetit!*

Please note that to avoid confusion the baby has always been referred to as 'she' but this could just as easily have been 'he'.

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# Chapter 1

## GETTING READY TO WEAN

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**No matter how contented you are breast-feeding or formula-feeding your baby, there comes a time when milk alone is not enough to satisfy her. She needs more calories and she needs more iron. In fact, she needs to be introduced to more solid food. But exactly when that time is depends on your baby. She will start to give you signals that she's ready and when that time comes you will find it helpful to be ready yourself. If you know what signs to look for in your baby, and have all the equipment you need, you are much more likely to have a relaxed and easy introduction to starting solids. Being prepared for weaning will help you both get off to a great beginning.**

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## **WHEN TO START**

The most recent advice from the Department of Health and other experts is that it is best to wait until your baby is six months old before you start to wean her. This is because up until then breast milk (or formula milk) provides a perfect balance of all the nutrients and goodness your baby needs to grow and develop healthily and is the food she will most easily digest and absorb. But at around six months her own supply of iron becomes depleted and your baby will benefit from the extra iron that is found in solid foods. By this time, too, your baby's digestive system has matured enough to make it easier for her to try a range of different foods without developing an allergic reaction.

But, as with most things to do with baby care, it's important to remember that every baby is different. Some babies are large and some are small, some have big appetites and others not so big. If you are prepared to follow your baby's cues rather than impose your own timetable on her you will find weaning is much more likely to be successful. So if you feel your baby is not satisfied by her milk feeds and is ready for solid food before six months old, the best thing is to talk to your health visitor or doctor first. They may be happy for you to start offering your baby solids earlier than six months - especially as until 2003, the official advice recommended starting weaning from as early as four months old. Do check though.

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## **PREMATURE BABIES**

**Be aware that the guidelines from the Department of Health do not apply to premature babies. If your baby was born prematurely you should talk to your doctor about the best time to start weaning.**

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## **Why you shouldn't introduce solids too early**

You must be careful not to start weaning too early and certainly never before 17 weeks, even if you have heard from people of a different generation that they gave their babies solid food from as young as 14 weeks old, as was common at one time. Here are the reasons why not:

- Breast milk contains everything your baby needs for the first six months. Once you introduce solid food into your baby's diet she will drink less milk and so won't benefit as much from the goodness of breast milk.
- Your baby's digestive system needs to be mature enough to absorb food properly.
- If you introduce solid food too early, it will pass through the body without being properly digested and could put an increased strain on your baby's kidneys.
- Your baby may be more at risk of developing a food allergy, especially if your family has a history of allergies.
- It can lead to an increased percentage of body fat and may lead to a baby becoming overweight.

## **Why you shouldn't introduce solids too late**

It is just as important not to wait too long after your baby is six months old to start weaning: The reasons for this are:

- Your baby's iron supply starts to run low so she needs to get iron and other nutrients from a wider range of foods.
- At around six months old, babies are happy to try new tastes and flavours. But after seven months some babies find it hard to accept different foods and may find chewing and swallowing lumps difficult. You may

have more problems with feeding if you leave it too long.

- By six months, your baby's jaw and tongue are developed enough to deal with eating and swallowing food. Learning how to chew food helps your baby's mouth and tongue to develop, which in turn helps develop the muscles needed for speech.



### **Signs that your baby is ready for solids**

Your baby's age is one guide for when to start weaning her, but this doesn't mean that on the day she is six months old exactly you have to give her some solid food. There are other signs you can look out for around the time your baby is six months old which will tell you when she is ready:

- She starts to demand more milk feeds than usual and doesn't seem satisfied with her normal amount.
- She begins to wake in the night, demanding an extra feed.
- She looks with interest at the food you are eating. She may even start to make some chewing movements and put things in her mouth.