Progressive exposure to a variety of textures and tastes, administered in the appropriate condition including timing and amounts, should lead to a successful transition to the second year of life and incorporation of family foods.

Key insights
During the weaning period infants experience important biological and neurodevelopmental milestones. The transition from breastfeeding to solid foods requires gastrointestinal maturity as well as the physical capacity to hold the head and trunk upright. Current research indicates that 4–6 months of age is a suitable period for the introduction of complementary foods. As children transition to the family diet, recommendations should address not only the type of foods but also the social context of eating.

Current knowledge
Eating not only impacts the infant's physical growth but also the emotional and psychosocial development. Exposure to a variety of food items, including fruits and vegetables, is associated with acceptance of these foods in later life. The behavior of the caregiver and the child's temperament affect the feeding relationship. Strategies such as punishment and distraction tend to aggravate potential feeding problems in the long term. The most effective approach is responsive feeding, whereby the caregiver responds to the child's cues of hunger and satiety and allows the child to set the pace for the timing and amount of a meal.

Practical implications
The success of complementary feeding requires the convergence of several factors. Adequate dietary diversity and appropriate food amounts must be coordinated with the correct timing. To this end, the cultural beliefs, educational level, and wealth status of the caregivers are key contributing factors. Education, both at the household and community level, is moving to the forefront as one of the most important modifiable influences on complementary feeding. Appropriate parental education is necessary to overcome the common difficulties faced (such as early food refusal) and to facilitate the successful transition to a varied, nutrient-rich diet.

Recommended reading