

Weaning Your Breastfeeding Baby



The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends mothers to exclusively breastfeed for the first six months of life. Thereafter infants should receive nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods while breastfeeding continues for up to two years or beyond.

Weaning can be easy or difficult. First, make sure it is what you want. If you are wavering, your baby can sense that and be confused by your ambivalence. When it has been such a warm, loving experience, it is sometimes hard to let that go and move on to the next stage. So think it through and if you are really sure, then you will send clear messages to your baby.

Mother-led Weaning

Mother-led means you decide when the time is right. Drop one breastfeeding (or pumping session) per week and replace it with a formula feeding or solid foods. If you are breastfeeding five times each day, then it would take five weeks to completely wean.

This is a slow gentle way for your baby to be transferred to another method of feeding and for you to reduce your milk supply. Some mothers like to keep one feeding for a longer period of time, such as a bedtime feeding.

You may accelerate this schedule if necessary by dropping one feeding every 2-3 days. If your breasts become engorged, use ice to your breasts at the end of feedings. Restricting your fluids and a tight bra may also help during this time.

You may experience a sense of sadness and loss during weaning. This is partly due to the loss of this close relationship, and partly due to the change in hormones from breastfeeding. Observe your breasts for lumps, and “hot spots”. Massage them during several feedings until they go away. You may hand express milk or use a breast pump at any time that you are uncomfortably full. If you develop a fever, red tender area or lump that will not go away, contact your physician.

Sage or peppermint tea, peppermint candy (natural flavor) and parsley may help reduce supply. You may also apply cabbage leaves to your breasts several times a day (see our handout “Breast Engorgement”).

Baby-led Weaning

Baby-led means your baby loses interest and weans himself.

Don't offer, don't refuse

Do not offer a breastfeeding, but breastfeed whenever your baby “asks”. Offer formula (or plain cow's milk if the baby is older than one year) or other solid foods at regular feeding times.

Post-pone Weaning If:

- Baby or mother is sick or hospitalized
- Family is traveling, during holiday periods or other periods of unusual stress
- Baby is teething
- You have mastitis
- Baby is in a growth spurt

Please be aware that the information provided is intended solely for general educational and informational purposes only. It is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your physician for any questions you may have regarding your medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have received in this program.

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