

What is Weaning

Weaning from breastfeeding is the process of switching a baby's diet from breast milk to other foods and drinks.¹ Most babies become curious about the new tastes and textures that are presented as you begin to expose them to new food options.²

When Should Weaning Start?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breast-feeding for the first six months after birth – and breastfeeding in combination with solid foods until at least age 1.³

In general, breastfeeding should continue for as long as you and your baby wish to go. The AAP advises introducing complimentary foods at 6 months. This helps to provide time for your baby's gastrointestinal system to mature.⁴

So, how do you know if your baby is ready to try some solid foods? Here's a few signs of readiness:⁵

- Sitting up with little support
- Good head and neck control
- Birth weight has doubled or more, and they seem interested in new foods.

How Does Weaning Work?

There are two basic ways to wean your baby from breast milk to solid foods. Spoon-fed weaning is the most common approach and simply means that you introduce solid, soft foods to your baby using a spoon.⁶ Be sure to take it slow and make sure that the food type, texture, or amount is not a choking hazard. For food safety, it's best to place the food into a bowl and spoon feed from that, instead of returning the spoon to a jar or container of food. You don't want to transfer bacteria from your baby's mouth back into the container.⁷

The other approach is known as Baby-led weaning. This style means that you allow your child much more of a role in exploring food as they transition from breast milk to solids. You allow them to learn to eat by placing chunks of soft foods directly within their reach and letting them choose which foods interest them. You'll always want to supervise your baby as they eat and it's best to have them in an upright, seated position.

One thing to be prepared for during weaning is gagging. Gagging is actually a good thing! This reflex is our body's natural defense against choking. It will probably happen more with Baby-led weaning. Although, research shows no substantial increase in the likelihood of choking, as long as food is prepared properly. If your child gags, it's best to let them. Try not to interfere as you don't want to push food down your child's throat while attempting to help. There's usually a lot of noises involved with gagging.

Choking is usually silent or close to it. This is when food blocks the windpipe. You may hear a high-pitched whistling sound or the missing sounds of air being breathed. **DO** intervene immediately! Remove food from their mouth only if you can see it. It's a great idea to learn Infant/Child CPR, choking, and first aid before any of these issues may occur. Call 911 for help immediately!

It is definitely possible and okay to combine both spoon-fed and baby-led weaning. You can offer solids when baby is not super hungry or super full after a breastfeeding session. Some parents like the variety of including both spoon and baby-led weaning for all of the benefits we just discussed.

Nutrition & Food Allergies

The transition from all of those amazing, natural nutrients found in your breast milk to other food sources, means that it is more important than ever to make sure your baby gets the best nutrients possible. You'll also want to look out for potential food allergies. Iron is the number one nutrient that should be your priority as it diminishes around 6 months.⁸ Many baby cereals and foods contain iron for this reason. Other vitamins and nutrients such as Vitamin D and Zinc are important to consider when making food choices. There are some common foods to avoid, such as honey, because of food safety risks.⁹

Keep in mind that it's normal to see changes in the texture and color of baby's stool during weaning. There are a lot of new things happening in your baby's body.

The weaning stage of life is a great time to start your child on a healthy food journey. You get to choose what food is available, when it's meal time, and how much is provided. This means that you can get your child accustomed to making wise food choices. Whether you choose spoon-fed weaning or baby-led the main thing is to make sure that you and your baby enjoy this fun, new experience with the whole family.

References:

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