



Weaning Your Breastfed Baby

Everyone has their own idea about when you should wean your baby. The best age depends on what you can do.

Here are the facts:

- The longer you nurse, the more health protection your baby receives. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends mother's milk only (no formula or baby foods) for the first 6 months and mother's milk plus baby foods after 6 months. If you wean too early, the protective benefits of mom's milk decrease.
- The worldwide average for weaning is 3 years old! So how long should you nurse? AAP provides a "healthy baby" guideline: Nurse for at least one year. It's great to nurse even longer, for as long as you and baby want.
- Nursing is good for toddlers. Rather than make them overly dependent, it builds a sense of security.
- Weaning is a gradual process. It begins when you start adding other foods. It ends when the baby is completely off the breast.
- Some babies get fussy during weaning. Be patient and give extra love and attention in place of nursing.

There are three types of weaning:

1. Baby-led (baby starts losing interest in nursing)
2. Mother-led (mom starts losing interest)
3. Abrupt (an unexpected situation arises where mom must wean quickly)

Baby-Led Weaning

Some babies start weaning themselves between 9 to 12 months old. Most want to nurse longer. Baby-led weaning can be a sad time for moms. Remember, your baby still loves you; she is just growing up! If your baby begins to wean on her own, don't offer the breast, but don't refuse it if she wants to nurse. Replace missed feedings with formula if your baby is less than a year old. If your baby is a year or older, give whole milk.

A baby who suddenly refuses to nurse may be going through a nursing strike. This can happen when babies are teething or ill. If your baby has a nursing strike, call for help. You don't have to stop nursing.

Mother-Led Weaning

Wean slowly! It will help avoid plugged ducts and breast infections. Your baby will also adjust better to the change. Begin by eliminating the feeding your baby wants the least. Replace this feeding with formula if your baby is under one year or with whole milk if your baby is over one year. After 4 to 7 days, replace another feeding. It should be from a different time of day such as a morning feeding, then an afternoon feeding. Continue replacing one feeding per day, every 4 to 7 days. If you have trouble getting your baby to take a bottle or cup, have someone else offer it. If your baby won't sleep, have someone else rock the baby to sleep.

If your breasts become hard and painful, you may express some milk by hand or with a pump for comfort. If you express too much milk, you will increase your milk supply. Call your doctor if you get lumps in your breast or fever and chills.

Abrupt Weaning

Abrupt weaning should only be done in an emergency, as it is uncomfortable for you and hard emotionally for the baby. It can lead to a breast infection or abscess. Express a little milk to relieve the pressure. Use ice packs to reduce swelling. Do not bind your breasts. Discuss possible use of estrogen with your doctor to reduce milk supply quickly.