

Weaning Your Breast-fed Baby

What is weaning?

Weaning means to offer food to your baby from a bottle or cup in place of a breast feeding. This is done to get your baby used to regular food and to stop breast-feeding. Weaning may be baby-led. For instance, when other foods are begun at around 6 months of age, your baby may begin to breast feed less. Weaning may also be mother-led. That is when mother decides she wants to wean.

When should you wean?

- Wean when it is right for you and your baby. Complete weaning will occur best when you and your baby are ready.
- If you had a deadline for weaning, but you are still enjoying nursing and so is your baby/child, there is no need to wean.
- If you are returning to work, you don't need to wean. You may still nurse for some feedings. Ask your nurse for PI-165, "Breast-feeding: Returning to Work," for more information.
- Some mothers wean their babies because family and friends suggest the infant/child should no longer be nursing. You should know that you can nurse as long as it feels right for you, your baby and your family. This may be 1 day or 3 years!

- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends nursing for at least 1 year.
- Baby-led weaning can occur around 1 year, but more often it happens between ages 2 to 4 years.
- Keep in mind that weaning will not help your baby or child sleep through the night, make you less tired, or make your baby depend on you less.
- Remember: any amount of nursing you do is good for your baby. The most important thing is to feel good about yourself and your baby.

How should you wean?

- To prevent breast discomfort, plugged ducts and mastitis, you should wean slowly. Going slowly will also be easier emotionally for you and your baby.
- To wean your baby slowly, substitute a bottle for 1 breast-feeding. Every 3 to 4 days, stop 1 more breast-feeding and offer a bottle. You may need to leave the room and let someone else give your baby the bottle.
- Bottle nipples have different flavors. Your baby might feed better on a silicone nipple because it doesn't have a rubber taste.
- If your child refuses a bottle, you may give a cup.

- For the child under 1 year old, stored breast milk or formula should be given.
- Start by omitting (stopping) the feeding your infant or child is least interested in.
- Once your body has adjusted to 1 less feeding, wait 3 days and then stop another feeding, using a different time of the day to do it.
- The last breast-feedings to be stopped should be the early morning feeding when your milk supply is usually greater and the bedtime feeding at night, which is often used for comfort.
- Spend a lot of time cuddling, rocking and playing with your baby or child during times you are not nursing.
- Often, nursing is a habit and if you distract your child with something else, the nursing will be forgotten. If you are weaning a toddler, offer a snack, such as crackers, juice or fruit, in place of the breast feeding. You can also go for a walk, go to the playground, or read a book to your child.
- Toddlers also want to nurse when bored, tired, hungry or when they simply want or need your attention. Changing your habits, such as not sitting in the chair you usually nurse in, is helpful.
- Do not try to wean during times of major change for you and your baby/child, such as a new home, a sick child, mom returning to work, a new baby in the house, a new babysitter or toilet training.
- Complete weaning should take place in 4 to 5 weeks if you have been nursing 8 to 12 times a day.

What if your breasts become engorged or uncomfortable even though weaning slowly?

- Wear a firm, not tight, fitting bra 24 hours a day for at least 1 week. Do not wear a bra with an underwire.
- Put ice packs or cool cloths on your breasts, or use cold, green, uncooked cabbage leaves.
- Shower with the warm water on your back, not your breasts.
- Take mild pain pills such as Tylenol or Motrin for comfort.
- Do not use manual expression or pumping to completely empty your breasts. Removing ½ to 1 ounce of milk from each breast will relieve pressure. (This is not enough to cause your breasts to keep producing milk.)
- You don't need to limit the amount of liquids you drink.
- Call your doctor if you run a fever, feel like you have the flu, or have any red, warm-to-the-touch areas on your breasts.

Mother's feelings when weaning:

Mothers often feel depressed or sad when weaning, whether weaning is mother or infant-led. This may be due to having less of the hormones that helped you feel calm while you were nursing. In a short time your body will adjust and these feelings should go away.

These feelings may also be caused by a sense of loss as the breast-feeding relationship comes to an end. Holding and cud-

dling your child will help. So will finding new activities to share.

Sudden weaning:

- You may need to wean suddenly, either for medical reasons or for personal reasons. If so, pumping or expressing just enough milk to relieve engorgement may help prevent plugged ducts and mastitis and help you feel more comfortable.
- Follow all the steps under “What if your breasts become engorged and uncomfortable even though weaning slowly?” listed above.

When is it a “nursing strike” and not weaning?

- “Nursing strikes” occur after the first 6 months and happen suddenly.
- A strike can occur when baby is teething, has a cold, thrush or ear infection, or has a cold sore in the mouth.
- A strike can also occur when mother’s menstrual periods begin, mother changes soaps or perfumes, or when the baby is frightened during a feeding by mother’s response to baby biting.
- Babies can refuse to breast feed after having a bottle which flows very quickly, especially if mother’s milk supply has lessened.

- Strikes can occur when babies start to crawl, stand or walk.
- A strike can last a few days or weeks.

Coaxing your baby back to breast after a nursing strike:

- Pump or manually express as long as your baby is not nursing.
- Try a different position and room. Try to nurse in a quiet, non-stressful room.
- Try to coax back to breast by cuddling skin-to-skin, and not force breast feeding.
- Try to figure out what caused the strike so you can avoid another.
- Offer the breast to your baby when he is still sleepy.
- Do not starve your baby by refusing to give a bottle so that he will go back to breast.
- If baby does not return to the breast within 48 hours and you can’t decide on the cause of the strike, see your baby’s doctor. It could be due to an ear or thrush infection.



If you have any questions,
call your doctor
or your baby’s doctor.