

Provider Information

BF - Breastfeeding

BF-W WEANING

OUTCOME: The parent/family will understand methods to effectively wean the child from breastfeeding.

STANDARDS:

1. Discuss reasons for weaning (e.g., including infant/child readiness, separation from mother, medication needed for mother that is contraindicated in breastfeedings).
2. Explain process of weaning, including replacing one feeding at a time with solids or milk from cup.
3. Explain managing abrupt weaning to prevent/reduce the risk of breast infections, such as pumping/expressing to comfort.
4. Explain social ways to replace breastfeeding such as reading books together at the table and playing with toys.
5. Refer to community resources as appropriate.

When is it time to wean my baby from the breast?

You should breastfeed until your baby is six months old. At six months, you can begin to introduce some solid foods. Even when you start giving your baby solid foods – you should continue to breastfeed your baby. The benefits of breast milk do not stop at a certain point. Instead, the benefits of breastfeeding continue and are more significant and longer lasting for both you and your child the longer breastfeeding continues. Child-led weaning occurs when a child no longer has a need to nurse - nutritionally or emotionally. A baby who self-weans is usually well over a year old. When a child is over one year old, the baby is also getting his or her nutrition from solids and is drinking well from a cup. A baby will usually cut down on nursing gradually if he/she is getting enough nutrition from solid foods but your baby will still enjoy the physical contact and security of being breastfed.

When weaning is rapid, the breasts may become uncomfortably full; a mother's body responds to signals to reduce milk production only gradually. As you breastfeed less, the mammary glands begin to return to pre-pregnancy size rapidly. Women, however, generally continue to produce milk for about 45 days after complete weaning with some women experiencing milk secretion for several months or more.

Abrupt weaning may leave a baby feeling as though his mother has withdrawn her love as well as her breast. The sudden shift in hormones may cause the mother to become depressed, especially if the mother is ambivalent about weaning or if she is prone to depression. The mother may also risk developing mastitis or a breast abscess. If abrupt

weaning is essential for any reason, measures should be taken to relieve any breast engorgement and to keep a careful watch for complications.

The protective effects of breastfeeding last well into childhood but a weaned child is more susceptible to infections, not only because of the introduction of other foods but also because of the loss of the anti-infective and protective properties of human milk.

Six months of age

Around the middle of the first year, most babies show signs of wanting something other than human milk. This begins the weaning process, but the length of time before a baby is fully weaned varies from baby to baby. Some are enthusiastic and others are not. Human milk is the most important food for their babies during the first year.

Developmentally the baby is ready to chew solids at about six months even though not all of his/her teeth have erupted. The introduction of new foods is important both socially and nutritionally. Additional protein becomes necessary toward the end of the first year and the infant needs bulk or roughage about this time. Eating solids and learning to drink from a cup are important social achievements. This does not mean, however, that breastfeeding should end, only that the baby's diet now includes solid foods and other liquids.

For the human baby, nursing supplies comfort and emotional support, the need for comfort sucking or non-nutritive suckling may last for several years – this is why toddlers and preschoolers want to use pacifiers and thumbs.

In conclusion:

As your baby begins to crawl, talk, and grow, they may also develop intense separation anxiety. The nursing attachment to their mother is very reassuring. Sudden refusal to nurse, especially when the baby is under one year, is not an indication that the infant is ready to wean but rather that he or she is communicating that something is wrong. Many mothers misinterpret this message and do wean completely at this time. Your decision to wean your baby should not be made quickly.

Remember: breast milk is best for your baby until they are at least one year of age.

Click here for a Patient Education Handout for the mother on [Breastfeeding and Weaning](#).

Flesch: 53/10th