

Weaning from Breastfeeding

The following information serves to provide some general guidelines for when you are considering to wean from breastfeeding. Every mother is different and what works for one mother may be different from another. These guidelines are suggestions and “food for thought” when you are considering the weaning process.

Disclaimer: This information should not be considered as medical advice.

The following notes outline

- A few first things to consider
- Approaches to weaning
- Weaning techniques,
- Night weaning in general
- Night weaning more geared towards a toddler (18+months)
- A few notes on Self-weaning
- The meaning of the word “Wean.”





The First Step!

- The first maybe most important question to ask yourself is **what is your reason to wean your baby from breastfeeding?**

Some examples to consider; Are you feeling pressured from outside sources? Your spouse, family or friends; Are you going back to work and may not be able to physically be with your baby to nurse?; Your quality of life is under a lot of stress and you are personally not enjoying nursing baby or feeling overwhelmed with a toddler wanting to nurse? Night time feedings may be taking a toll on you, you know baby is eating, gaining weight and you perhaps feel ready to night wean? Whatever the reason might be, take some time to reflect on the reason before moving forward.

What are Baby's needs? What are your needs?

- **Consider both Baby's needs and mother's needs**
Remember that there is an emotional component to breastfeeding. It is not just for a nutritional value! Breastfeeding is away of bonding and connecting with your baby. It gives your baby a sense of comfort and security. When baby nurses, oxytocin is released in both mom and baby This is our "love hormone" which plays an vital role in feeling loved, wanted, secure and connected. (side note: this is the hormone released during love making)
- Be aware that weaning can bring on feelings of sadness and depression for the mom and sometimes baby too..There are hormonal shifts that occur. As you wean, there is
 - Decrease in Prolactin (responsible for milk production and a sense of calmness).
 - Decrease in Oxytocin (responsible for let down and the 'love/bonding hormone')
 - It is normal for mom to feel a sense of loss or sadness during the weaning process. Be gentle with yourself.

Is Baby Developmentally ready for the weaning process?

- **Weaning readiness is a Developmental Milestone**

Just like walking, talking “sleeping through the night” or potty training, every baby/toddler reaches this milestone at a different time.

So timing plays a big role when we talk about weaning. Is baby really ready to wean on a developmental level. Babies who are less than 6 months really do get the majority of their nutrition from breastmilk so weaning before 6 months is not encouraged.

(The American Association of Pediatrics recommends that baby continues to nurse up until the age of two) Sometimes you may start the weaning process and then see that baby isn't responding well and this might be due to starting the process too early or your approach needs to be more gentle. Watch for these signs of stress: fear of separation, increased crying, more night waking, biting or sucking, tummy ache, emotional withdrawal.

Things to note in general

- From the age of 9-10 months, baby does not need any additional milk during the weaning process. Added nutrition can be provided through solids such as cheese, yoghurt.
- Babies 6+months developmentally become less interested in nursing. They are typically more distractible during the day and hence have an increase in night nursing. Try to be flexible and know that it is part of developmental milestones and timing
- American Association of Pediatrics recommend to breastfeed at least to 12 months and to continue for as long as “mutually desired” by mother and child



There are two main approaches to Weaning

1. Baby-led
2. Mother-led

Baby-led weaning

- This is the most ‘natural path’ to follow
- You allow baby to wean at his/her own pace
- Baby may nurse well over 1 year of age
- Breastfeeding becomes more important for comfort and reassurance than nourishment
- Occurs when baby no longer has a need to nurse

Mother-led weaning

- This is when the mother decides to take a more active approach in the weaning process
- It is suggested to still be gentle, flexible and gradual if you take this approach
- Gradual is best for both baby and mom
- It can be a difficult transition for baby/child depending on how close this is to his/her own natural timeframe for weaning. (as mentioned before that weaning is viewed as a developmental milestone)
- Because this is a more active approach, you will need to offer LOTS of bonding time, one on one connection opportunities to replace the bonding time that baby/child would normally get from breastfeeding. Baby/child will NEED this. Try BE PRESENT when you are nursing or connecting in other ways (no phone, TV etc just be in that moment)
- Be aware that if baby expresses a STRONG NEED to nurse, don't refuse BUT also, if baby doesn't ask, rather don't offer☺
- An idea with the Mother-led weaning is to wait until baby is 18 months. From around this age, baby can understand when mom says “No” or “Later”

**BE AWARE that sudden weaning is very distressing for both mom and baby. A more gradual approach is less distressing on mom's breasts, milk supply as well as hormonal and emotional adjustments.



Weaning Techniques

- Don't offer, Don't Refuse
 - This is the most gentle, active approach
 - Natural transition as child gets older
 - Gradual, takes the child's needs into account

- Drop one feed at a time
 - Take away one feed for 3-7 days. Slower is better before dropping the next feed. This is also better for milk supply as it is a gradual decrease.
 - Choose the feeding least important and then offer distractions (sippy cup, favorite snack)
 - Still offer other feeds
 - Naptime, first morning feed and bedtime feed are usually the last to go.

Note: One feed can last for a few months before baby is completely weaned. This is very normal. Generally moms find that having one feed is a great time to bond and connect with baby and is their 'special' private time and tend to keep it going for a while.

- Distraction/Substitution
 - Employ this BEFORE the child wants to nurse. It is a good idea to anticipate and be prepared to use distractions before you know your child will ask for the feed.
 - You can also trade nursing for a much wanted toy/snack/game that you know your child might really want.

- Change in Routine
 - Evaluate when does your child typically nurse or want to nurse and avoid those routines/activities/nursing cues. Some moms have to avoid sitting down all together in front of their toddlers so that they don't recognize it as a nursing cue! If your child generally nurses more when you are at home, try get out of the house or vice versa.

- Be aware of clothing
 - Wear clothing that makes it less accessible for your child to reach for your breast

- Shortening Nursing Sessions
 - You can try shortening the length of time that you allow baby to your breast. So you may let them nurse for say 10 mins but then say "ok, all done" and move onto another activity instead of letting them continue to nurse until they decided

- Separate Day and Day weaning

Night Weaning

- Sleeping through the night is a developmental milestone therefore all babies/ children achieve this at their own pace.
- You can encourage less night nursing, however first be sure to eliminate discomforts such as
 - Teething
 - Room temperature
 - Solid foods just before bedtime as it can cause digestion issues
 - Allergies
 - Reflux
 - Illness

Note: If your baby/child has any of the above, try to eliminate these first before night weaning or really even with day weaning, you would need to be more gentle with your approach or even need to push pause on the weaning process. You may find you need to nurse more during the process if your baby or child is sick or struggling during a season of discomfort.

- Increase day nursing to encourage less night nursing
- During the day, ensure that you decrease the outside distractions so that baby/child is able to nurse well. You may need to nurse in a quieter room without the distractions from other family members, T.V, outside distractions
- You can nurse more often in the hours leading up to bedtime
- When baby/child wakes to nurse at night, feed only on one side. Allow him/her to nurse completely on one side only.
- One approach is to dream feed right before you get into bed. So if you initially put baby down in the crib, when you go to bed, pick baby up and offer the breast, allow baby to nurse and then put baby back down. This can give you a better stretch of sleep when you first go to bed as baby has just nursed.

Other things to consider:

- Decrease activity before bedtime
- Massage before bed. This can help to relax baby/child and stimulate melatonin which aids in better and more prolonged sleep
- Take a look at your sleeping arrangements. Sometimes baby/child or mom may need to sleep in a separate room so baby doesn't sense mom is there however on the other hand, part time co-sleeping is sometimes beneficial. So baby initially goes down in the crib but then mom brings baby to the bed to nurse lying down and baby will settle more easily laying next to mom. It is important however to move baby a little away from mom after the feed so baby can't easily access the breast during the night.

Night Weaning

(Typically 18+ months)

- Approach this with *gentle methods*.
- Limit access- move baby back to cot or away from you
- Wear clothing that is not as easy accessible for baby to nurse
- If possible, work out a strategy with your spouse. He can go to baby and comfort baby by holding, rocking, cuddling back to sleep
- Increase daytime contact and opportunities to connect
- Talk with your toddler..eg “num nums go night night”
- You can decide to say “No” or “Not now..later”..(18+ months -baby will understand more at this age)
- Substitute the night feeds with other comfort measures (a night lovie, sippy cup of water)
- Night weaning is NOT going to get baby to sleep through the night
- The Goal is to maximize sleep for everyone.

Also, ask yourself if night nursing is **truly interfering with your quality of life?** If so, take the necessary steps to take action..maybe you are actually ok with nursing once in the night and continuing this until baby is ready to drop it. Just take some time to reflect on this.

Remember to **allow yourself to be flexible**. This is a process and if you decide on one way and find it isn't working, you can always regroup and make the necessary changes. Also, baby could be teething or sick and you may need to push pause for a while then get back to you later.

Note, whether day weaning or night weaning:

- Weaning can be a drastic change when a child is well so weaning when a child is sick is even more so. It is best not to start or progress with weaning when the child is sick



Some notes about Self Weaning!

- It is sometimes heard that babies self-wean..to be clear, it is actually very uncommon for a baby to self-wean before the age of 1 years old.
- It is also unusual for a baby of 18-24 months to self-wean unless mom is actually encouraging weaning.

Typically,

- Self –weaning occurs **well over 1 year** (more closer to 2)
- When **most nutrition is from solids**
- Child **drinks well from a cup**
- Child cuts down on nursing **gradually**

The **NEED to nurse, both nutritionally and emotionally is no longer a need** ☺

The meaning of the word “WEAN”

- The word “wean” means **a passage from one relationship to another NOT a loss or detachment form a relationship**
- It is a transition

Therefore, it is a gradual replacement of breast feeding. *It actually begins form the moment your baby starts to take something other than breast milk..so form the start of solids you begin the process..*

“In ancient writings, the word “wean” meant to ripen- like a fruit nourished to readiness, it’s time to leave the vine.. Weaning was a joyous occasion because a weaned child was a valued as a fulfilled child; a child was so filled with the basic tools of the earlier stages of development that she graduated to take on the next stage of development more dependently.”

~Taken from The Baby Book by Willeam Sears. MD and Martha Sears. RN pg 187



Take a deep breath mama..you got this!

*If you have any comments or questions please feel free to reach out via email julia@joyful-connections.com

Dancing alongside you in Motherhood,

Julia xo