

Weaning Your Breastfed Baby

What is it?

Weaning begins naturally with the introduction of foods other than breast milk.

The Canadian Paediatric Society and Health Canada recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and continued breastfeeding after the introduction of solid foods for up to two years and beyond.

Gradual or Baby-Led Weaning

With this approach to weaning, your child sets the pace. Breast milk is still the most important food for your baby in the first year. With the introduction of solid foods, your baby gradually starts to breastfeed less. Gradual weaning is encouraged because:

- It allows your child to continue to feed on demand (when they want to feed)
- Breastfeeding provides your child with comfort and security which is important for emotional development
- It is less stressful to the mother-child relationship than abrupt weaning

Abrupt or Mother-Led Weaning

For various reasons (e.g., illness, separation of mother and baby), a mother may need to wean her child from the breast. If you are unsure about your decision to wean, it may be helpful to talk with a Health Professional or other breastfeeding mothers.

Strategies for Gradually Weaning Your Child

- Eliminate one breastfeeding at a time. Begin with the feeding that your child will miss the least. If your child is breastfeeding frequently, you can eliminate one feeding every several days or weeks. Early morning or bedtime feedings are often the most difficult to wean.
- Shorten the length of feedings or only offer one breast at each feeding.
- Change the breastfeeding routine. Some children like to breastfeed at nap or bath time. They may have a favourite place to feed. Try feeding at a different time or in a different place.
- Offer something other than the breast such as a drink, favourite food or toy, a comfort object (e.g., blanket), or read a story. It may be helpful to have someone other than mom offer these things to your child.
- Don't offer and don't refuse. Try not to offer to breastfeed but don't refuse when your child is persistent.
- For your older child (two years and beyond):
 1. Try to delay the feedings. When your child asks to breastfeed, ask her to "wait until we get home" or "wait until after lunch" or "wait until after we read a story."
 2. Set a date with your child to wean. Suggest, "after your birthday, we won't breastfeed during the day anymore" or "we won't breastfeed during the night anymore."

Risks of Weaning Abruptly

- When a mother stops breastfeeding, her body continues to produce breast milk. If the milk is not removed, the breasts become engorged. Symptoms of engorgement include breast swelling, tenderness, warmth, redness, throbbing or pain which may be accompanied by blocked milk ducts.
- Engorgement and blocked ducts can lead to mastitis (breast infection). Women will have flu-like symptoms, such as fever, chills, headache and general aches, in addition to the symptoms of engorgement. Contact your doctor if you develop any of these symptoms.
- When breastfeeding is stopped quickly, the hormone that produces breast milk decreases quickly. This can cause overwhelming feelings of sadness and depression.
- If your period has not yet returned, keep in mind it will likely return within a few weeks. Also, remember it is possible for you to become pregnant at any time.

Guidelines to Manage Engorgement and Blocked Ducts

- Express **only** as much milk as necessary to feel comfortable. Expressing a little milk whenever you feel full will tell your body to slow milk production. Over time, your supply will decrease.
- Apply cool compresses to your breasts (10 to 15 minutes at a time as often as needed) to help reduce any swelling.
- Binding your breasts tightly does not help reduce milk supply and is not recommended.
- Use of medication to dry up your milk is not considered safe and is no longer recommended.

Try to avoid weaning during times of stress for your child such as:

- Moving to a new bed or new home
- Teething
- Arrival of a new baby
- During an illness
- Parental separation

Breastfeeding should never be withheld as a means of discipline or punishment.

For more information, call Region of Peel—Public Health at 905-799-7700
Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Caledon residents call free of charge at 905-584-2216
www.BreastfeedingInPeel.ca

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