

Breastfeeding Information

Breastfeeding information topics

Weaning

Every breastfed baby is eventually weaned, be it after a few weeks of breastfeeding or a few years. When this happens is really a matter for a mother and her baby and their personal circumstances. If you are undecided or need more information, then a chat with an Australian Breastfeeding Association counsellor (<http://www.mothersdirect.com.au/catalogue/booklets>) may help.

Breastmilk contains all the nourishment babies need in the first half year of life. While babies start to have other foods and drinks from about 6 months onwards, breastmilk is still the main part of their diet for the rest of the first year. No matter how long you continue to breastfeed, your milk is always nutritious and absolutely right for your baby's stage of development.



Mutual weaning

The natural weaning process begins once your baby starts to have anything other than breastmilk. This includes water, juices, solid foods and other milks. However, most of us think of weaning as the time during which our babies start having fewer and fewer breastfeeds until they are completely replaced by other foods and drinks.

Baby-led weaning

Sometimes your baby will decide for himself that he has had enough. This can make you feel disappointed, sad or even rejected. This is especially so if you were looking forward to many more months of leisurely feeding. A chat with an Australian Breastfeeding Association counsellor (<http://www.mothersdirect.com.au/catalogue/booklets>) may help.

Sometimes a baby's refusal (</bf-info/breast-refusal>) may be temporary. The Australian Breastfeeding Association booklet *Coping with breast refusal* (<http://www.mothersdirect.com.au/catalogue/booklets>) has more details.

Mother-led weaning

- You have had enough. Mothers of older babies and toddlers sometimes feel like this, especially if your baby loves to feed frequently, especially during the night. For specific ideas on weaning toddlers or an older child, see the *Weaning toddlers* (</bfinfo/weaning-toddlers>) article on this website.
- You wish to become pregnant and breastfeeding could be preventing ovulation. See the *Breastfeeding through pregnancy and beyond* (</bf-info/breastfeeding-through-pregnancy-and-beyond>) and *The Lactational Amenorrhea Method (LAM) for postpartum contraception* (</bfinfo/lactational-amenorrhea-method-lam-postpartum-contraception>) articles. The Australian Breastfeeding Association booklet, *Breastfeeding through pregnancy and beyond* (<http://www.mothersdirect.com.au/catalogue/booklets>), has more detailed information on this subject.
- You have been advised to wean for medical reasons. If you are not keen to wean, let your medical adviser know how you feel. Sometimes weaning is not the only option. The Australian Breastfeeding Association booklet *Breastfeeding and hospitalisation* (<http://www.mothersdirect.com.au/catalogue/booklets>) and/or a

breastfeeding counsellor may provide some ideas to discuss with your doctor if you find yourself in this situation.

Weaning slowly

Weaning slowly is the ideal situation as it protects your baby during the weaning period. As you reduce the number of breastfeeds, your milk supply will slowly decrease. This reduces the risk of blocked ducts and mastitis. Weaning slowly also gives your baby time to adjust.

You don't always have to wean

Sometimes a mother is pressured to wean, even though both she and her baby are enjoying breastfeeding. She may have been told to wean for one of the following reasons:

Milk quality or quantity

You may hear women say that their milk 'dried up' or that it started looking 'thin and watery' or 'wasn't rich enough'. Mature human milk is naturally bluish and looks thin when compared to other milks. Watch for your baby's feeding cues ([/bfinfo/feeding-cues](#)) and be sure to feed your baby as soon as he asks to be fed. Also see the article [Low supply \(/bf-info/common-concerns%E2%80%93mum/supply\)](#) on this website.

Going back to work

Many women return to work ([/bf-info/breastfeeding-and-work/can-you-return-work-and-still-breastfeed](#)) and continue to fully or partly breastfeed. The Australian Breastfeeding Association booklet *Breastfeeding: women and work* (<http://www.mothersdirect.com.au/catalogue/booklets>) gives much more detailed information.

Sick baby

Breastmilk contains immune protective factors which may help your baby to recover more quickly. Breastfeeding is also a great way to comfort a sick or distressed child.

Sick mother

Talk to your medical adviser about the effects on your milk of any medication ([/bf-info/safe-when-breastfeeding/breastfeeding-and-prescription-medications](#)) you are taking. It is rarely necessary to wean to protect your baby from your illness.

Troubles with biting

Many babies get their first teeth between 6 and 9 months of age. This does not mean that you have to wean. You may also like to look at the website article [Biting \(/bf-info/common-concerns%E2%80%93baby/biting\)](#).

Refusal to suck

Check out the article on refusal and read the Australian Breastfeeding Association booklet *Coping with breast refusal* (<http://www.mothersdirect.com.au/catalogue/booklets>) for more suggestions.

Return of menstrual cycle

There is no need to wean because of the return of menstruation. Some mothers notice that their babies seem fussy a few days before their period starts and for the first couple of days of the cycle.

Pregnant and still breastfeeding

It is possible to continue breastfeeding if you fall pregnant. See the *Breastfeeding through pregnancy and beyond* ([/bf-info/breastfeeding-through-pregnancy-and-beyond](#)) article. The Australian Breastfeeding Association booklet, *Breastfeeding through pregnancy and beyond* (<http://www.mothersdirect.com.au/catalogue/booklets>), has more

information on this subject.

Community pressure

As your baby grows older, you may have pressure to wean, perhaps from your family, friends or neighbours. This is when you need the moral support of other mothers of older breastfeeding babies. ABA's local group get-togethers (/contacts/groups) are one place where you can find this.

Planned weaning

If you need to wean quickly, here are some suggestions that will make weaning more comfortable for you and less upsetting for you and your baby. Your milk supply will gradually decrease as milk is removed less often.

- Depending on your baby's age and how much she needs to suck, you can wean on to a cup or a bottle.
- Start dropping the breastfeed that your baby seems least interested in. Then cut out one breastfeed every few days, or one each week, depending on your own comfort, and how willing to cooperate she is.
- Whether you replace the missed feeds with formula, cows' milk or water, will depend on the age of your baby and the other foods and drinks she is having. If your baby is less than 12 months of age and is being weaned from breastfeeding (or breastmilk feeding), she will need to have breastfeeds replaced with formula. If your baby is older than 12 months of age, she can have cows' milk as a drink. Ask your child health nurse to help you with this.
- Make sure you still spend plenty of time with your baby and give her lots of cuddles.
- If your breasts become engorged, hand express or use a hand pump until you are comfortable. Do not try to empty your breasts. You do not want your supply to build up again.

If your baby is unwilling to follow your lead, here are some more ideas, which will also help reduce your milk supply as your breasts will be stimulated less:

- Offer your baby a dummy for extra sucking if she needs it.
- Give your baby formula before breastmilk, if doing both at the same feed.
- Offer one breast only at each feed and ensure that your baby has plenty of other drinks.
- Feed your baby to a fixed routine if this is possible.

For specific ideas on weaning toddlers or an older child, see the Weaning toddlers (/binfo/weaning-toddlers) article on this website.

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