

Baby-led Weaning

Baby-led weaning is a common-sense, easy and enjoyable way to help your baby move on to family meals



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What is baby-led weaning?

Baby-led weaning is a way of introducing solid foods that allows babies to feed themselves – there's no need for spoon feeding or purées. The baby sits with the family at mealtimes and joins in when he is ready, feeding himself first with his fingers and later with cutlery.

Baby-led weaning:

- › allows babies to explore taste, texture, colour and smell
- › encourages independence and confidence
- › helps to develop their hand-eye coordination and chewing skills
- › makes picky eating and mealtime battles less likely

All healthy babies can begin to feed themselves from about six months. They just need to be given the opportunity.

Why baby-led weaning makes sense

Baby-led weaning is based on the way babies develop in their first year. Babies' immune and digestive systems aren't ready for other foods until they are about six months old – breast milk (or infant formula) is all healthy babies need until then.

In the past, when babies were started on solid foods at three or four months, they had to be spoon fed with purées. At six months, most babies are able to sit upright, pick up pieces of food, take them to their mouth and chew them – in other words, they can feed themselves.

If you've waited until your baby is six months to introduce solid foods you've skipped the purée stage, so there's no need to start that way.

How do we get started?

- › **Sit your baby upright**, facing the table, either on your lap or in a high chair. Make sure she is able to sit steadily and can use her hands and arms freely.
- › **Offer your baby food, rather than give it to her** – put it in front of her, or let her take it from your hand, so that the decision is hers.
- › **Start with foods that are easy to pick up** – thick sticks or long strips are best at first. Introduce new shapes and textures gradually so that your baby can work out how to handle them.
- › **Include your baby in your mealtimes whenever you can.** As far as possible – as long as it's suitable – offer her the same food as you are eating, so that she can copy you.
- › **Choose times when your baby is not tired or hungry**, so she can concentrate. Mealtimes at this stage are for play and learning – she will still be getting all her nourishment from her milk feeds.
- › **Carry on offering breast or formula feeds as before** – this is still your baby's main source of nutrition until she is a year old. When she needs less she will reduce her milk feeds herself.
- › **Offer your baby water** with her meals so she can drink if she needs to. If she chooses not to, that means she doesn't need to.
- › **Don't hurry your baby or distract her** while she is handling food – allow her to concentrate and take her time.
- › **Don't put food into your baby's mouth for her or try to persuade her to eat more than she wants.**



Photos: © Katja König

Which foods can I offer my baby?

You can share most healthy family foods with your baby. For example, fruit, cooked vegetables, meat, cheese, well-cooked eggs, bread (or toast), rice, pasta, and most fish are suitable. Start with foods that are easy to cut into sticks or large strips.

Offering your baby a variety of foods will give him the chance to discover different tastes and textures and ensure he gets all the nutrients he needs.

Foods to avoid

- › Added salt and sugar (read labels carefully – many foods, such as baked beans, pies, sauces and gravy, contain a lot of salt)
- › “Fast foods” and ready meals
- › Honey, shellfish, shark, marlin and under-cooked eggs

Tips

- › Don't expect your baby to eat much at first. Many babies eat only small amounts for the first few months of baby-led weaning. For your baby these early mealtimes are about discovering and learning rather than eating.
- › Expect some mess! Spread a clean mat under your baby's chair to protect the floor – and so you can hand dropped pieces back to him.
- › Keep it enjoyable. That way your baby will be keen to try new foods and look forward to mealtimes.

Won't he choke?

Even when weaning was recommended from four months, parents were encouraged to introduce finger foods at around six months to help their baby



BEFORE

Note that in the beginning the baby only eats small amounts of the offered food.



AFTER

develop his chewing skills – the difference with baby-led weaning is that there's no spoon feeding alongside the finger foods. So, provided basic safety rules are observed, choking is no more likely with baby-led weaning than with the conventional method of introducing solids. In fact, allowing babies to control what goes into their mouths may actually help them learn to eat safely.

Keep your baby safe

- › Make sure your baby is sitting upright to eat.
- › Avoid nuts, whole or in pieces.
- › Cut small fruits such as olives and cherries in half; remove any stones.
- › Don't let anyone except your baby put food into his mouth.
- › Explain how baby-led weaning works to anyone caring for your baby.
- › NEVER leave your baby alone with food.

Note

If you have a family history of food intolerance, allergies or digestive problems, or any other concerns about your baby's health or development, you may wish to discuss the introduction of solids with your health advisers.



The “Baby-led” series of books, by Gill Rapley and Tracey Murkett, includes *Baby-led Weaning*, *Helping your baby to love good food*, *The Baby-led Weaning Cookbook*, *Baby-led Breastfeeding* and *Baby-led Parenting*.

For more information see www.baby-led.com and www.rapley-weaning.com



IBCLC

International Board Certified Lactation Consultants are the only internationally approved breastfeeding and lactation specialists having a medical background.

The decision to breastfeed or not to breastfeed has short- and long-term impact on the health of child and mother. However, breastfeeding sometimes turns out to be difficult and perhaps professional, competent assistance is needed.

Contact your IBCLC