

E Nurture

A newsletter for breastfeeding mothers
by Barbara Berges, BS, RN, IBCLC, Lactation Consultant

Weaning: A Practical Guide

One topic of interest to mothers that you seldom see discussed is weaning, or the stopping of breastfeeding. An earlier **Nurture** discussed the benefits of breastfeeding related to different ages of the baby – days, months, and years. Reread that issue to reinforce the value of nursing your baby at every age.

Weaning should be the gradual end of a pleasant, loving breastfeeding experience. A successful breastfeeding experience is one in which the baby is happy and well-nourished and the mother is content and satisfied.

Reasons for Weaning

- ☺ Baby has outgrown need to breastfeed
- ☺ Mom and baby are happy with breastfeeding and have reached a point where it is time to move on
- ☺ Mom has reached her goal for length of breastfeeding and wants to wean

Reasons NOT to Wean

- ☺ Not enough milk
- ☺ Baby suddenly refuses to breastfeed
- ☺ Baby fussy at breast
- ☺ Baby not gaining well enough
- ☺ Mom too tired
- ☺ Mom has breast infection
- ☺ Mom and/or baby are sick
- ☺ Baby teething
- ☺ Social engagement
- ☺ Return to work
- ☺ Pressure from others

When problems arise (such as those listed here as reasons not to wean) there are usually explanations and breastfeeding management techniques that can solve them. A call to the Breastfeeding Helpline (585) 368-4033, or

La Leche League (585) 275-5151 can help with difficulties and improve the breastfeeding relationship.

But what do you do when it is time to stop breastfeeding? That depends on the age of the baby, however weaning should always be done gradually and with loving concern for the baby's and mom's feelings and well-being. How does the baby separate the "mom" from the "milk?" When you are weaning, you want to be sure that the child knows that only the milk part is ending, and mom will still be there with lots of love.

When the child is very young (birth to nine months) and is still getting all or most of his nourishment at the breast, wean by gradually dropping one breastfeeding a day and substituting a bottle feeding. Drop one breastfeeding (perhaps early afternoon) and wait two or three days for your body to adjust your milk production downward. Then drop another breastfeeding (perhaps early evening or during the night) and again wait for your body to adjust.

This method avoids extreme engorgement for the mom, along with the possibility of pain and/or a breast infection developing. It is important to substitute a bottle and formula at this stage because babies still have strong sucking needs and special nutritional requirements throughout the first year of life. Consult your doctor.

For a baby nine months to one year old who is eating some other foods and drinking from a cup, follow the same procedure as above, dropping one breastfeeding at a time, but you may be able to substitute other foods or drink for some of the breastfeedings.

A child of this age still needs to suck, so you'll most likely need some bottles. Again, consult your doctor.

**Family Birth Place at
Park Ridge Hospital**

Unity Health System
www.unityhealth.org



When the child is over one year of age, he has already started weaning. At this age, most children are eating and drinking a variety of foods. Breastfeeding, although still an excellent source of nutrition, becomes more important for “nurturing” than for “nourishing.” Many children breastfeed only in the morning, at nap time, and bedtime. Nursings are still important when not feeling well, or to fix hurts and heartbreaks, or to help get back to sleep during the night.

When you drop one nursing at a time, offer other things to substitute for breastfeeding – juice, a snack, reading a book, going outside, rocking, etc. – may satisfy the child and gradually lead to weaning. Change household routines to avoid “cues” to breastfeed, so that the child is not reminded to nurse. For example, if you usually sit in a particular chair to nurse, avoid using that chair; have dad give the bath and put pajamas on the child; read a bedtime story; fix breakfast as soon as the child awakens; etc. Postponing nursing and shortening the length of nursings are also techniques that lead to gradual weaning when combined with other distractions.

Remember to keep the child’s feelings in mind as you progress. Be flexible about your timetable for weaning, if possible. If the child seems upset, slow the pace of dropped nursings. Perhaps partial weaning (where the child is still breastfed two to three times a day) is an option that you and he can be comfortable with, rather than stopping completely. Substitute lots of holding and

attention at other times to reassure the child that you are still there, just the breastfeeding is changing.

Many moms are surprised to discover feelings of sadness and depression when the baby weans. Some of this may be delayed postpartum depression. Hormonal levels are elevated while breastfeeding, so weaning really brings you back to your pre-pregnant state. Also, weaning is a rite of passage. This stage of your life is over, and your baby is growing up.

This information is not presented to encourage weaning. Actually there is no need to begin a formal plan for weaning because all children will eventually give up breastfeeding as they outgrow the need.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months; then breastfeeding with other foods for at least the first year, and beyond. Many mothers have found toddler nursing a wonderful way to help themselves and their child through the difficult months (the “terrible twos”) as he struggles to become more independent.

When to wean is a personal, family decision and there is not one answer that is right for everyone. A successful breastfeeding experience is not measured by days, months, or years; a gradual end to this close, loving relationship that leaves both mother and child feeling content and fulfilled is the goal.

For help with weaning or any other aspect of breastfeeding,
call the lactation consultants at
The Family Birth Place at Park Ridge Hospital.

Breastfeeding Helpline
(585) 368-4033