



Feeding, Sleeping, Connecting

Gentle Weaning



When mothers are ready to wean, they often wonder if it's the right time and what's the gentlest approach. For many moms, the right time for them may not be the right time for baby. This does not mean a mother cannot wean off the breast but it does mean that, depending on their baby's age, an alternative to the breast must be considered first.

Both the American Academy of Pediatrics and The World Health Organization agree that weaning off human milk or a human milk alternative (formula) is not recommended before 12mos of age. Until 12mos, for every baby, human milk or formula should remain primary regardless of baby beginning to consume solids after 6 months.

If weaning off the breast is desired before 12mos of age, mom must be prepared to offer an alternative such as pumped human milk or formula in a bottle. Bottle feeding should mimic breast or chest feeding as closely as possible and therefore paced bottle feeding is the preferred method for both pumped human milk and formula along with continuing to feed on demand or responsive cued feeding.

If considering weaning off the breast after 12mos, baby's diet should be considered as well. If a baby is still not consuming the bulk of his nutrient needs by way of solid foods, which is common and normal, then prioritizing and increasing solid food intake before weaning off the breast is recommended. Providing pumped human milk (or toddler formula milk) in a cup along with meals throughout the day may also be an option to consider if weaning off the breast after 12mos.

SO, HOW DO I GENTLY WEAN?

There are are two methods: Baby-led and Parent-led

The Baby-led Approach

This is the gentlest approach to weaning as it is based on a simple premise, "don't offer but don't refuse." With this approach, mom doesn't offer the breast to baby throughout the day, but also doesn't refuse the breast if baby signals that they want to nurse. The idea here is that as baby grows, explores his world, and begins to prioritize solid foods over time, they will slowly begin to wean off of the breast at their own pace and when they are ready. It is also the approach that takes the longest amount of time and therefore appropriate for moms who are ok with continuing to breastfeed long-term and likely past 2yrs of age.

The Parent-led Approach

If mom desires to wean nursing within a shorter span of time, then this approach is an option. This is still a gentle and gradual approach that may take up to 2-3mos. It is never recommended to wean "cold turkey" off the breast for two reasons:

(1)

It places mom at greater risk of harmful physiological issues involving her breasts, including clogged ducts and mastitis, that can be very painful and require medical attention.

(2)

It can be emotionally traumatic for baby/toddler, as they will not fully grasp the sudden change and are not often ready to wean off of the breast when mom is ready. Remember that nursing at the breast provides them with not just their nutrient needs, but psychological needs as well. Breastfeeding is a relationship, not just a behavior. Moving at a slower pace can help mitigate the stress of no longer being able to nurse for comfort and also allows mom to gradually replace that form of connection with other forms that are just as comforting for baby.

With the Parent-led Approach, it is recommended that mom drop one nursing session at a time per week. This same nursing session can be gradually decreased over the span of 3-7 days, meaning that if the nursing session usually goes on for 15min, mom could reduce it to 10min that first day by unlatching baby/toddler and continue to decrease the time every subsequent day over the span of the week. It is not recommended that mom drop more than one nursing session per week. It is recommended to avoid eliminating day and night feeds at the same time. Eliminate all day feeds first, leaving feeds associated with naps last. Eliminate night feeds second, leaving the first feed before bed for last. This gradual weaning makes it easier for mom's supply to regulate down to the new demand without fullness and discomfort.

Alternatively, if mom can't really determine what time feeds usually occur, she can choose a time frame instead to hold a no nursing boundary. Such as: start with no nursing between 7am and 11am week one. Mom can then gradually extend this time frame once a week by 2-3hrs. Such as: week two, no nursing between 7am and 2pm. Same process could be used for weaning during the night. Such as: we will comfort and soothe without nursing between 8pm-1am week one.

If mom is weaning a toddler, it can be helpful to let them know that the nursing session is coming to an end before unlatching. It can also be helpful to prepare an older child before the weaning process begins by purchasing story books about weaning and reading them together every day leading up to the start of the weaning process so that they become familiar with the concept and what it will look like for them.

Once mom has weaned off of one feeding (or time frame) without feeling discomfort or fullness then she can move on to the next nursing session (or time frame) at the start of the following week. Mom should continue to offer the breast and nurse as per usual for the rest of the other nursing sessions throughout the day/night.

Mom shouldn't offer nursing sessions she has already weaned off of, but there are special instances to consider. Things like growth spurts, teething, illness, emotional distress, and developmental milestones can cause weaning to halt temporarily as baby may need the extra comfort or antibodies at the breast to get through these periods. It is ok to take a pause and meet baby's needs, before commencing the weaning process once more.

Offering alternative forms of comfort/soothing and distractions from nursing is helpful and key during this process:

- *Have snacks and a cup of water/toddler formula on hand*
- *Offer activities, toys, read a book*
- *Plan a special activity each day to replace that nursing session*
- *Offer extra cuddles, physical affection, connection, and undivided attention*
- *Avoid familiar places/things that are strongly connected to nursing baby*
- *Wear tops that cover breasts making them less visible and accessible*

Mom, Take Care of Your Breasts During this Process

BREASTS FEELING FULL AND UNCOMFORTABLE?

DO NOT PUMP!

You can take a warm shower or soak breasts in a warm tub of water. Hand express just a little to feel comfortable again. Milk production is supply and demand so by removing less milk, your breasts will begin to regulate and produce less.

WERE YOU TOLD TO BIND YOUR BREASTS?

Breast binding is an outdated practice that can lead to clogged ducts, mastitis, and breast abscesses. Just don't do it.

STILL FEELING DISCOMFORT AFTER HAND EXPRESSING?

Ibuprofen and other pain relievers can be used to help mom feel more comfortable during the weaning process.

If mom feels a painful lump in her breast or feels flu like symptoms, is feverish, & breast turns red/pink, painful, and hot to the touch, mom should immediately reach out to her CLC/IBCLC and doctor.

OTHER METHODS THAT CAN DECREASE SUPPLY WHEN/AFTER ELIMINATING THE VERY LAST FEED?

Raw cabbage leaves in mom's bra
Birth control pills with estrogen
Peppermint and menthol
Decongestants



Lastly, for every mom reading this, be proud of your feeding journey however long it lasted.

Every time you nursed, pumped, or supplemented for your baby was an act of love.

Every bottle feed or nourishing food you offered and will offer, long after nursing at the breast is over, is a testament to your ever present love and commitment to your child.

You are your baby's best bet, their answer, and YOU ARE ALWAYS ENOUGH!

Best Wishes during this New Phase of your Motherhood Journey!

Gloria