

Baby-Led Weaning

“Baby-led weaning” is a different approach to starting solid foods. It is popular in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. In the U.S., the term weaning refers to ending breast or bottle feeding but in many other countries, weaning refers to the introduction of solid foods.

In baby-led weaning, babies 6 months and older bypass pureed foods and go straight to finger food. 6 months of age is recommended to introduce solid foods because:

- Babies can sit up by themselves
- Grab and hold onto objects
- No longer have a tongue-thrust reflex (this reflex causes babies to push food out of their mouths)
- Their intestines are able to absorb solid foods

Benefits of baby-led weaning -

- Babies become more familiar with different textures and flavors than babies fed purees
- They may be less likely to become overweight compared to spoon-fed children. The baby is in control of how much she will take, which allows her to self-regulate how much she eats based on her hunger level
- Helps develop manual dexterity and hand-eye coordination
- Learns to chew

Downsides of baby-led weaning -

- It's messy
- You need to pay attention to iron intake - babies usually start solid feeds with pureed iron rich foods such as iron fortified cereals and pureed meats. These foods can also be given while baby-led weaning is started in order to add iron to the diet.

Won't the baby choke?

Studies have shown that there is no more gagging or choking with baby-led weaning versus feeds with pureed foods.

Safety tips -

- Avoid serving foods that are choking hazards: nuts, whole grapes, apples, whole cherries, raw vegetables, citrus fruits (unless each segment has been peeled), popcorn and food cut into “coins” like sausage or carrot
- **Never** leave the baby alone while she is eating
- Keep the baby upright in her high chair while eating
- Make sure other caretakers follow these safety precautions

Other things to know:

- Continue to nurse or bottle feed
- Be less concerned about feeding schedules and offer food at family mealtimes and let your baby decide if she is interested in eating
- Cut food into sticks or strips rather than bite-sized pieces, so your baby can hold them in her fist and chew from the top down
- Start slowly - In the beginning place one or two pieces of food in front of your baby
- Don't worry about plates or bowls. Just put the food on the high-chair tray
- Offer a variety of foods and help your child learn to like different flavors and textures
- Let your baby set the pace. As she gets better at feeding herself, she will eat more solids and decrease her breast milk or formula intake