

BABY-LED WEANING

A Guide For Parents

What is Baby-Led Weaning?

Baby-Led Weaning (BLW) is a method of introducing solid foods to your baby that skips the use of infant cereals and purees. Instead, it focuses on letting your baby feed themselves right from the beginning, usually around 6 months of age when they are developmentally ready. This approach involves offering table foods directly from the family meal, allowing babies to explore and eat at their own pace.

Benefits of Baby-Led Weaning:

- **Healthy Relationship with Food:** BLW encourages babies to enjoy food and mealtimes without pressure, helping them develop a positive attitude towards eating.
- **Learning Opportunity:** Babies use all their senses to explore different foods, improving hand-eye coordination, dexterity, and facial muscle strength.
- **Reduced Pickiness:** Exposure to a wide variety of foods can lead to less picky eating habits.
- **Convenience and Cost:** Babies eat the same food as the family, which is easier and less expensive than preparing separate purees.

Signs of Readiness for Baby-Led Weaning:

- Baby is around 6 months old.
- Can sit up with little or no support.
- Shows interest in food and reaches out to grab things.
- Loss of the tongue-thrust reflex (will not automatically push food out of their mouth).



Tips for Successful Baby-Led Weaning:

- **Wait Until Your Baby is Ready:** Most healthy children over 6 months old are developmentally able to self-feed. If your baby was premature, use the adjusted age. Consult your pediatrician if there are any concerns about your baby's development, particularly with sucking, swallowing, or breathing.
- **Continue Breastfeeding or Formula:** As your baby starts solids, they will gradually take less milk, but this is a slow process.
- **Engage at Mealtime:** Sit with your baby, socialize, and supervise during meals.
- **Start with Soft First Foods:** Offer ripe fruits, cooked egg yolks, flaky fish, moist and shredded meats, puffed cereals, and cooked pastas and vegetables.
- **Prep Foods for Easy Grasping:** Cut foods into substantial-sized pieces like long, thin strips or coin-shaped pieces.
- **Prepare for Messes:** Expect messes as your baby explores food. Use a splash mat under the high chair and an art smock instead of a bib for easy cleanup.
- **Dine Together:** Give your baby some of the same ingredients from your dish.
- **Join an Online Support Group:** Connect with other parents for support and advice (see resources below).

What Not to Do for Baby-Led Weaning:

- **Choose a Bad Time for Meals:** Avoid mealtimes when your baby is tired or upset.
- **Expect it to Work for Every Baby:** Not all babies may take to BLW immediately.
- **Panic Over Gagging:** Gagging is common as babies learn to manage finger foods.
- **Rush Your Baby:** Plan for at least 10-15 minute meals.
- **Get Lax on Safety:** Avoid choking hazards like grapes, hot dogs, raisins, popcorn, raw vegetables, and sticky nut butters. Always stay with your baby during meals.
- **Ignore Your Baby's Signals:** If your baby is throwing food, they may be full.



- Rely on Sharp Utensils or Hot Foods: Let your baby handle kid-safe utensils and ensure food is barely warm or cool.
- Give Up: Some babies may need time to adjust to BLW or prefer purees initially.

Foods to Avoid Due to Choking Hazards (6-12 months):

- Honey
- Mould-ripened soft cheeses
- Whole cow's milk (or goat's / sheep's milk) as a main drink. You can introduce a little into your baby's foods from six months, once she's started on solid
- Shark, swordfish or marlin (due to high mercury levels)
- High choking-risk foods like whole grapes and whole/chopped nuts (although nut butters can be given at six months)
- Stimulants such as chocolate, sugar, or caffeinated drinks such as tea, coffee, hot chocolate and cola
- Processed foods such as battered foods, sugary breakfast cereals, chips, and other foods that contain sugar

Gagging vs. Choking: *Understanding the difference between gagging and choking is crucial for keeping mealtimes safe.*

- **Gagging:**
 - Gagging is a natural reflex to prevent choking.
 - Signs of gagging include coughing, making noise, and sometimes vomiting.
 - It happens quickly and is a normal part of learning to eat solid foods.
 - The gag reflex in babies is sensitive and triggered by food farther forward in the mouth.
- **Choking:**
 - Choking occurs when the airway is partially or completely blocked.
 - Signs of choking include silence or gasping, and the baby may turn blue.
 - Choking is a medical emergency that requires immediate attention.



Safety Tips for Mealtimes:

- Ensure your baby sits upright during meals.
- Never leave your baby unattended with food.
- Avoid putting food into your baby's mouth; let them self-feed.
- Be cautious with foods that pose a high choking risk (see the list above).

Resources:

- Books:
 - Baby-Led Weaning: The Essential Guide to Introducing Solid Foods—and Helping Your Baby to Grow Up a Happy and Confident Eater Paperback by Gill Rapley PhD & Tracey Murkett
 - Simple & Safe Baby-Led Weaning: How to Integrate Foods, Master Portion Sizes, and Identify Allergies Paperback by Malina Malkani MS RDN CDN
 - Baby-Led Feeding: A Natural Way to Raise Happy, Independent Eaters Paperback by Jenna Helwig
- Websites:
 - Baby Led Weaning: <http://www.babyledweaning.com>
 - Sarah Remmer: <https://www.sarahremmer.com>
 - Mama Natural: <https://www.mamanatural.com>
 - Baby Center: <https://www.babycenter.ca>
- Facebook Groups:
 - Baby Led Weaning and Combo Feeding Without the Woo
 - Baby Led Weaning Canada
 - Baby Led Weaning for Beginners & Beyond (BLWBB)

For further information and personalized advice, please reach out. Happy weaning!

