

Mother Led Weaning

How long a mother chooses to breastfeed her baby depends upon many factors. It is recommended that a baby be exclusively breastfed (no solids or formula) for approximately six months, with breastfeeding to continue for at least 12 months, or longer, if desired by a mother and her baby. The longer a mother breastfeeds, the greater the benefits for both mother and baby. However, some babies will wean themselves before 12 months, and, some mothers find they must wean their baby before their baby is interested in weaning. In either of these situations, the following information may be helpful.

- **If possible, wean slowly, over a period of weeks.** This is easier for both your body and your baby.
- **Drop one breastfeeding at a time.** Choose the feeding that your baby is least interested in. Depending upon your baby's age, offer a bottle or cup of pumped milk or formula, or solids, to replace the breast feeding. Breast milk or formula should remain the primary food in your baby's diet until baby is one year old.
- **If your baby refuses to take a bottle, cup, or solids from you, have someone else offer the feeding.**
- **Every three to five days, if you feel your breasts have adjusted, you may replace one more breastfeeding with pumped milk, formula, or solids.** First morning, nap time, and bedtime breastfeedings are often the most difficult for a baby to give up.
- **If your breasts become very full and uncomfortable,** you may try to offer a brief breastfeeding
- **Increase cuddling time with your baby, but once you decide to give up a feeding, stay the course unless you change your mind and decide not to wean for now.** Otherwise, it can be confusing for your baby that one day they can nurse and the next they cannot.

If Sudden Weaning is Necessary:

- **When your breasts feel uncomfortably full, pump for five to ten minutes.** Remove only enough milk from your breasts to slightly soften them. This will be easier with a pump, rather than removing your baby from your breast when they are not finished or satisfied.
- **You may apply cold packs to your breasts to reduce pain and swelling.** You may also take ibuprofen (Advil/Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) for comfort. Wear a snug bra for comfort.
- **Pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) is an over-the-counter decongestant which decreases the hormone that makes milk** and can help decrease milk production faster. Be aware that this medication is a stimulant and has the potential to affect your sleep. Most people can tolerate one or two doses a day.
- Herbal remedies are also an option that have been helpful for some women to suppress milk production.
 - **Sage:** Sage Extract by Herbpharm can be helpful. Start with 25 drops in one ounce of water or juice at bedtime after emptying both breasts. It seems to work better if taken



- when breasts are empty. You should notice less fullness the next morning. If not, try 40 drops that evening and watch supply the next day. The maximum dose is 60 drops. Once you notice a definite decrease in production do NOT take any more Sage. Wait a few days and if supply comes back up, take another dose, and talk to your lactation consultant about your frequency of removal. Some moms find it helpful to take one dose every week or two to keep production at a comfortable level.
- **Peppermint or Spearmint:** Mint tea is available at most grocery stores. Be sure to get herbal mint tea – not a flavored black tea. To make 2-4 cups of mint tea: • Pour 2-4 cups of boiling water over 2-4 teabags and steep for 10 minutes until nice and strong. To increase strength, use more tea bags than cups of water. • You may keep it in the fridge, reheat in the microwave, or put all four cups in a sports bottle to sip at room temperature all day long. You may sweeten the tea if desired. • Some women will add sage for a stronger effect. You may also combine mint tea with sage tea (available at most health food stores). To make 4 cups of mint/sage tea: • Pour 4 cups of boiling water over 3-4 mint teabags and 3 sage teabags and steep for 10 minutes. Drink hot or cold, sweetened or unsweetened. • As your milk production slows, you can gradually back off to one or two cups a day. • Do not stop it suddenly. You may need to continue a cup or two a day until you feel your supply has stabilized. Even then, keep a box of tea on hand.
 - If you must wean immediately for medical reasons, Cabergoline can be prescribed by a physician, nurse practitioner or midwife.
 - **Continue to remove only enough milk to slightly soften your breasts until your breasts are no longer firm and uncomfortable.** Some women will continue to produce small amounts of milk long after they stop pumping or nursing. Try to avoid “checking” for milk. The more stimulation your breasts receive, the longer they will produce milk.

Reviewed: February 2024