

Breastfeeding Your Baby: About Weaning

Families and cultures have different views about weaning. In the English language, weaning has several different meanings.

- The natural weaning process begins when solid foods (sometimes called *weaning foods*) are added to a baby's diet. This usually occurs around 6 months of age when babies may show an interest in food, are able to sit up for feeding, and are ready to digest other foods. Parents can start to offer some mashed foods with a spoon, and the baby should continue to breastfeed. Very gradually, other foods begin to replace breast milk. The mother's milk supply decreases very slowly. Some mothers may continue breastfeeding through the toddler years, if mutually desired. Some children, if allowed to gradually decrease feedings on their own, will nurse at "quiet times," some up until 4 to 6 years of age.
- Weaning the child from the breast generally indicates a process in which the mother has decided to stop breastfeeding. This type of weaning can be sudden or gradual, depending on the circumstances or the mother's preference. If you decide to wean from the breast before 1 year of age, start a cup or bottle gradually over several days. Use the cup or bottle for one feeding and work your way up to more. It helps if your baby isn't too hungry because then they may be more patient trying the new feeding method. It helps if your partner or a caregiver gives your baby the cup or bottle when you are not around. Your baby will need time to get used to the new method. This type of weaning results in some temporary engorgement. As the engorgement fades, the milk supply decreases.
- Complete weaning is when breastfeeding stops. If your baby is weaned completely from breast milk before 1 year of age, feed your baby infant formula and not cow's milk. Your baby should not receive cow's milk until 1 year of age. After complete weaning, your milk will gradually dry up. You may feel sad, guilty, lonely, or depressed about giving up the closeness that comes from breastfeeding. These feelings are natural. Cuddle and interact with your baby even more. Remember that weaning is a natural step in helping your child grow up.

Visit [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.HealthyChildren.org) for more information.

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