Questions Mums ask about Stopping Breastfeeding

Also referred as Weaning From the Breast

Should I stop breastfeeding now?

It's up to you to decide when you want to stop breastfeeding, but research shows that many mums wish they'd breastfed for longer than they did. Consider talking to a breastfeeding counsellor about any issues or problems you are having before stopping breastfeeding. Sometimes people will tell you that you can't do something when you are breastfeeding but check it out first as there are many myths around. Symptoms of colic and reflux are likely to be worse in formula fed babies (and there will be other risks to your baby's health if you stop early).

Are there any other options rather than completely stopping breastfeeding?

- Continuing to breastfeed and combining this with expressing breastmilk for your baby.
- Partial weaning.
- Gradual weaning so that there is the opportunity to increase breastfeeding again.
- Exploring related issues, for example, positioning and attachment difficulties which may be causing soreness or sleep issues or routines. You could discuss these with a breastfeeding counsellor or health visitor.
- Consider whether you are thinking of weaning because of pressure from others.

What do I replace breastfeeding with?

You can wean to a cup rather than a bottle in a baby over 5 - 6 moths. It is recommended by dentists and others that babies should not have bottles after they are 12 months old.

Babies under 12 months should not be given ordinary cow's milk as a drink so they will need either expressed breast milk, or infant formula if weaned from the breast, or a combination. Once they are over six months, they could have breast milk or infant formula or a combination of the two, alongside solid food. Babies and toddlers over 12 months can be given full fat cow's milk.

Q. Does taking medications mean I have to stop breastfeeding?

A. Taking medications *doesn't* usually mean you need to stop breastfeeding.

Sometimes it is suggested to mums that they need to stop breastfeeding so that they can take a particular medication or have a medical procedure. There are very few medications which are not compatible with breastfeeding or for which there is no alternative, but check first and tell your doctor you are breastfeeding. See the BfN website for factsheets on medications and breast milk www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk or your *Birth to 5* book or ring or email the Drugs in Breastmilk Helpline 0844 412 4665.

"The chemist said I should stop to take a particular medication but then I found out it wasn't necessary so I started breastfeeding again, but I wish I'd had more information in the first place."

I'm going back to work in a couple of months

Returning to work doesn't mean you need to wean, and you have rights under UK law. You could express milk while at work and/or continue to breastfeed when with your baby. Some mums choose to partially or fully wean when they go back to work (see the ABM information page on returning to work for more detailed information and options).

Should I wean before we go on holiday?

Breastfeeding can be very flexible when travelling and will also protect your baby or toddler from infections, and ear problems when on a plane.

How to avoid breast problems when weaning?

If you stop breastfeeding suddenly then you may get blocked ducts or mastitis. Stopping gradually should prevent this happening, and is gentler on baby and mum has time to adjust to hormonal changes too. In the few situations where abrupt weaning is chosen or necessary, you may choose to use a pump or hand express. See http://www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Parents/Resources/AudioVideo/Hand-expressing1/ for a video on hand expressing.

Dropping one feed at a time is often suggested. Many mums who do this over weeks or months have no problems but there are a few things to watch out for even when dropping from one feed a day to none. When reducing from one feed a day to no feeds, especially if weaning has been mum-led and not child-led, it may be sensible to express for a few minutes every other day and then every third day.

"I thought it would be fine to drop the last feed the same way as I stopped the other feeds. However five days after my toddler had his last feed, I got blocked ducts. After speaking to a breastfeeding counsellor I had a good soak in the bath and expressed some milk a couple of times. Once the blocked ducts had gone, I expressed every other day for a few more days to prevent it happening again. I gave my toddler the expressed milk on her cereal."

Different types of weaning

Baby-led: baby leads the pace and weaning is usually gradual. Sometimes if your baby or toddler is unwell, the frequency of feeding increases again temporarily.

Mum-led: mum decides when she is ready to wean.

Partly baby-led, partly mum-led: this sometimes happens when mum returns to work, especially if mum chooses not to express at work. If you continue breastfeeding when at home, you may still be able to wean gradually.

How can I encourage weaning from the breast?

- One strategy is 'Don't offer, don't refuse'.
- Avoid sitting in the chair or position where you usually feed your baby.
- Avoid weaning at times of change if possible, for example moving house or holidays.
- Give plenty of cuddles generally.
- With an older baby or toddler, avoid clothing that makes access to breast feeding very easy.
- Think about which feeds you and your baby enjoy most and reduce breastfeeding at a different time of day first.

- Distract your baby or toddler with other activities at the times they usually nurse, for example a toy or a trip to the park.
- You could try shortening feeds gradually.
- You may find you need to spend some time developing a new bedtime routine. If your older baby or toddler currently feeds to sleep before naps and bedtime, try to leave them a little awake and make new associations with the final process of falling asleep—perhaps a cuddly toy, a song, or a key phrase. Then gradually lengthen the time between the breastfeed and sleeping time until it becomes dropped from the routine entirely.
- Due to the effect on dental health of other milks and bottlefeeding, it's recommended that you do not replace a breastfeed with a final bottle before sleep.

How can I get support with weaning and further information?

You could talk through options for your specific situation with a breastfeeding counsellor, either at a support group or via one of the helplines -- ABM 0300 330 5453 or NBH 0300 100 0212

For more information you can read:

- Introducing Solids to your Breastfed Baby
- Breastfeeding your Toddler
- Breastfeeding and Returning to Work
- Expressing Breast Milk

ABA booklet available from the ABM:

Breastfeeding through Pregnancy and Beyond

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers Helpline
0300 330 5453

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