

There are many reasons why women decide not to breastfeed, are unable to breastfeed, or decide to wean after a period of breastfeeding. The reasons and timing will be different for each mother and baby.

The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding until around six months of age, the slow introduction of family foods from around six months, and continued breastfeeding until the age of two years and beyond. However, some women need or want to suppress their breastmilk or wean before this time.

Suppression is the term used when you choose not to or are unable to breastfeed and suppress milk production at birth. Weaning is the term given to stopping breastfeeding (usually gradually) after a period of breastfeeding. (The term weaning is also sometimes used to mean the process where mothers gradually introduce their babies to family foods while continuing to breastfeed).

Weaning and suppression can cause different feelings and emotions. These can be discussed with your midwife, child and family health nurse, your GP, or an Australian Breastfeeding Association counsellor. Babies who are younger than 12 months and are not breastfeeding need a suitable cow's milk based infant formula. After 12 months, full-fat cow's milk can be given, toddler formulas are unnecessary.

Suppression after birth

Colostrum (first milk) is produced as early as 16 weeks into your pregnancy. A few days after the birth your breastmilk volume will increase even if you have decided not to breastfeed.

As breasts become full, heavy, and tender use the following methods to reduce breast discomfort:

- A comfortable, supportive bra and breast pads may be useful.
- Apply cold packs such as chilled washers or a bag of frozen peas and change them often enough to keep you comfortable. Use for about 20 minutes before removing, reapply as required.
- Limit stimulation and handling of your breasts.
- Avoid heat on breasts.
- Take paracetamol as directed to relieve pain and discomfort.
- Hand express enough milk to keep your breasts comfortable and avoid mastitis. This does not increase your supply because you are not emptying the breasts.

Gradual Weaning after a period of breastfeeding

If you have been breastfeeding and decide to wean, it is better to do it over several days or weeks rather than suddenly. This is the safest method as it allows your baby and your breasts time to adjust. It reduces the risk of engorgement, blocked ducts, and mastitis.

- Drop one feed every few days. Replace this with family foods or milk from a bottle or a cup.
- Express for comfort as necessary at this time, reducing this slowly. Watch for any signs of mastitis, such as redness, pain, or fever. If these occur, continue to express until resolved and contact a healthcare professional.
- When your breasts feel comfortable, drop another feed.
- Continue to drop feeds in this way.
- You can use this method if you return to work as it allows your baby to continue receiving

breastmilk and gives you and your baby some one-to-one time together after being apart.

- During this time some breastfeeds may be substituted with family foods, formula, or cow's milk.
- Leakage may occur for some time after the discomfort has settled.

Abrupt weaning after a period of breastfeeding

This is the sudden ending of all breastfeeds and is not recommended. You should seek the advice of your Child and Family Health Nurse, GP, Australian Breastfeeding Association Counsellor, or lactation consultant if you find it is necessary.

How to suppress if you have been expressing and bottle feeding your milk

Slowly reduce the time expressing or slowly extend the time between the expressing sessions. Express just enough to keep your breasts comfortable. This is particularly important for any mother who has been expressing by pump for more than two weeks.

Weaning a toddler or older child

- See gradual weaning method above.
- Offer alternative drinks (water or milk) in a cup and/or healthy snacks (for example fruit or cheese) at times you normally breastfeed or when your toddler or child asks for a breastfeed.
- Wear non-breastfeeding clothes; avoid clothes that show your breasts.
- Avoid sitting in your usual breastfeeding positions.
- Plan outings or activities to distract your toddler.
- Give extra cuddles and smiles.
- You may be able to gently discuss weaning with your toddler or older child.

Things to watch for

- Engorgement. This is when breasts become hard, red, shiny, and painful. Should this happen, expressing and emptying breasts once can relieve the pain. Continue to express just enough milk for comfort over several days. Delay dropping another feed until this has settled.
- Mastitis. This is a tender, inflamed area on the breast often accompanied by fever and joint aches and pains. Refer to the Mastitis leaflet and contact your midwife, Child and Family Health Nurse, Lactation Consultant, Australian Breastfeeding Association Counsellor or GP.

If you are unsure about your particular situation, seek the guidance of a healthcare professional or an Australian Breastfeeding Association Counsellor.

Resources

- Your Midwife, Child and Family Health Nurse, or Lactation Consultant
- Australian Breastfeeding Association www.breastfeeding.asn.au Helpline: 1800 686 268.
- Raising Children Network www.Raisingchildren.net.au
- Australian Infant Feeding Guidelines (2012) www.eatforhealth.gov.au
- If you need an interpreter, please call Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450

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