

Baby-Led Weaning: Is It Safe?

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For a baby's first several months, they get all the nutrition they need from breast milk ([/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/Where-We-Stand-Breastfeeding.aspx](#)), formula ([/English/ages-stages/baby/formula-feeding/Pages/choosing-an-infant-formula.aspx](#)) or a combination of both. At around 6 months of age, they're usually ready to try their first few bites of solid food ([/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Starting-Solid-Foods.aspx](#)).



Families have long relied on pureed (mushy) foods to make the transition simpler. This makes sense, since infants aren't always ready to chew and swallow solid foods. But a method known as baby-led weaning is changing the way many parents feed their little ones.

Exactly what is baby-led weaning? What are the benefits and risks of choosing this way of nourishing your child? Read on for helpful insights.

The basics of baby-led weaning

Baby-led weaning, sometimes called "auto-weaning" or simply BLW, is a way of slowly changing how an infant eats. It involves moving them from a diet of only breast milk or formula to a mixed diet that includes some solid foods.

Usually, babies are ready to introduce solids into their diet at around 6 months ([/English/ages-stages/Your-Childs-Checkups/Pages/Your-Checkup-Checklist-6-months-old.aspx](#)) of age. Sometimes, though, infants may be ready as early as 4 months old.

How does baby-led weaning work?

The process of baby led weaning typically involves these steps:

- **You offer your baby small portions of whatever's on the family menu.** Pieces should be easy for little fingers to grasp, but small enough to prevent choking (see below).
- **Ideally, your baby sits with the family to eat.** This fosters warmth and closeness while giving you the chance to notice how your little one is doing (but without taking over).
- **Your baby self-feeds.** Instead of spooning bites up for them, you let them eat at their own pace. If you're offering something soft like mashed potatoes, cottage cheese or yogurt, you can provide a baby-safe spoon (and model how to use it).
- **You don't require them to finish all their food.** Your baby eats as much as they like of each food you've offered em.

- **They learn by doing.** When your baby bites off too much, the extra will spill out of their mouth, helping them discover what fits (or doesn't). With daily practice they'll gag and spit less and enjoy more. [Back to top](#)

What are the benefits of baby-led weaning?

There are very few studies on the health advantages of baby-led weaning. But advocates of the method point to several possible benefits.

- **Promoting independence** by letting little ones feed themselves.
- **Offering more flavors and textures**, which could reduce the chances of picky eating (</English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/How-Do-I-Help-My-Picky-Eater-Try-More-Foods.aspx>) later.
- **Focusing more on whole foods** instead of processed purees in jars or squeeze packs.
- **Letting babies stop when they're satisfied**, which may help prevent obesity (</English/health-issues/conditions/obesity/Pages/childhood-obesity-a-complex-disease.aspx>).
- **Improved motor skills** (</English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/Movement-4-to-7-Months.aspx>) from grasping food, handling a spoon, chewing and swallowing.

Is it safe for my baby to eat on their own?

With all the advantages it may seem to offer, baby-led weaning does have risks and drawbacks that families need to know about, too.

- **Your baby may take in too few calories.** For example, they might love fruit but turn away from meats, cheeses and other choices that deliver the food energy needed for healthy growth.
- **The baby-led weaning foods they like best might not have enough iron** (<https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/infantandtoddlernutrition/vitamins-minerals/iron.html>) **and other micronutrients** (<https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/features/micronutrient-facts.html>). Many self-feeding diets are rich in vegetables and fruits but low in iron, vitamins, minerals and other essentials.
- **Little ones can choke.** Online videos showing babies biting into a whole chicken leg might be cute, but they're dangerously misleading. Choking (</English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/Choking-Prevention.aspx>) is one of the leading causes of unintentional death for infants, making this a risk that parents need to consider. However, some studies suggest baby-led weaning does not pose higher choking risks than traditional feeding.

Common-sense points to consider about BLW

At the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), we appreciate parents who want to learn all they can about childhood nutrition. As you're deciding whether baby-led weaning is the way to go, here are some insights that may help.

- **You can flex the baby-led concept to fit your family.** For example, if you choose to feed your baby with a spoon for a few days or weeks, don't worry—they will still learn to eat independently! Pureed foods can be nutritious, too, and they're easy to make from fresh ingredients—so don't feel guilty for offering them occasionally. Families that travel or keep tight schedules may find purees more portable.
- **Sometimes you'll need to take the lead.** For example, health experts recommend that most babies eat small portions of peanut butter (</English/health-issues/conditions/allergies-asthma/Pages/Peanut-Allergies-What-You-Should-Know-About-the-Latest-Research.aspx>), dairy and eggs around 6 months of age. (For many, this early sampling may prevent allergies later.) To follow this advice, you may need to flex baby-led weaning rules to ensure your child tries these foods.
- **Every baby is different.** Most are ready for solids by 6 months. But if your child was born prematurely, has difficulty sitting up on their own, or struggles to chew and swallow even soft solids, it's better to wait. Maybe the true meaning of "baby-led" feeding is to watch for signs of readiness (</English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Starting-Solid-Foods.aspx>) without rushing the process.

- **Breast milk or formula help fill nutritional gaps.** Your baby will benefit from the iron, vitamins and minerals in breast milk or formula while they're exploring new foods. Continue to offer smaller portions of breast milk or formula, either between meals or alongside solids. [Back to Top](#)

More health and safety tips for baby-led weaning

- **Sit your child in a highchair for stability and comfort.** Buckle the harness while they're eating.
- **Cut foods into finger-shaped pieces** (similar to a small baby carrot). This makes it easy for your child to grab one end and chew on the other. Don't offer round, coin-shaped slices of veggies, fruits or meat, since those can increase choking risks.
- **Think soft!** Foods your baby can mash with their gums or chew with just a few teeth are perfect. Ripe bananas, berries and avocados are good examples. Steamed, softened veggies like broccoli or carrots are fine, too. Shredded lean meats work well, with eggs, yogurt and cheese as protein alternatives. Here are some choking hazard foods to skip (</English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/Choking-Prevention.aspx>) during your baby's first year.
- **Watch for gagging and choking.** Notice if certain foods are too hard or pieces too big for your baby to eat. Be prepared to clear your baby's throat if they start to choke. Here's how (<https://www.redcross.org.uk/first-aid/learn-first-aid-for-babies-and-children/choking-baby>).
- **Have a chat with your child's health team.** It's good to check in with your pediatrician or family physician before starting baby-led weaning. They will focus on your baby's specific needs and help you design a feeding plan that helps your child thrive.

More information

- [Starting Solid Foods \(/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Starting-Solid-Foods.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Starting-Solid-Foods.aspx)
- [Weaning Your Baby: Is it the Right Time? \(/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/Weaning-Your-Baby.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/Weaning-Your-Baby.aspx)
- [Choking Prevention for Babies and Children \(/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/When-Not-to-Wean.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/When-Not-to-Wean.aspx)
- [Ask the Pediatrician: Is it OK to make my own baby food? \(/English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/Is-it-OK-to-make-my-own-baby-food.aspx\)](/English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/Is-it-OK-to-make-my-own-baby-food.aspx)
- [Sample Menu for a Baby 8-12 Months Old \(/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/sample-one-day-menu-for-an-8-to-12-month-old.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/sample-one-day-menu-for-an-8-to-12-month-old.aspx)

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