

### Weaning your breastfeeding child

- Occurs when your child begins to eat or drink anything other than breastmilk
- Is a normal stage in development

Health Canada recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of your child's life, with continued breastfeeding in addition to healthy solid foods until your child is two years or older.

### When do I wean my child?

- No "right" age to wean
- Breastmilk will help to keep your child healthy and breastfeeding will make your child feel secure for as long as you breastfeed
- Weaning happens when you and your child are ready, and not on the advice of family and friends



### What can I feed my child in place of breastmilk?

Depends on your child's age:

#### Under 9 months

- If not breastfeeding, give pumped breastmilk or commercial iron-fortified infant formula

#### From 9 months

- If eating a variety of solids, can use whole cow's milk (3.25% Homo milk)

#### After 24 months

- Talk to your doctor about giving 2% cow's milk

Refer to the handout *Feeding Your Baby: Birth to 12 months* or *Feeding Your Toddler: 12-36 months*

**Tip:** Try a sippy-cup instead of a bottle. Remove the spill-proof valve to make it easier.

You've got what it takes!

## How do I wean my child?

There are different ways to wean. Find the method that is right for you and your baby.

### *Natural weaning:*

- Child-led
- Occurs when a child slowly shows less interest in breastfeeding over a number of weeks or months
- The age will vary from child to child, just like walking or talking does
- Average age is between 2.5 to 7 years
- Lets your child outgrow the need at their own rate and stop breastfeeding when they are ready



### *Gradual planned weaning:*

- Mother led
- Gradually replaces breastfeeding with other kinds of attention and affection
- Allows your milk supply to decrease slowly so you will be less likely to have breast pain or an infection
- Is easier than abrupt weaning for both yourself and your child
- May take place over several weeks or months

#### **How to gradually wean:**

- Drop one breastfeed per day to start
- Drop your child's least favourite feed first
- Favourite feeds are usually when your child first wakes up in the morning or just before bedtime as these feeds are often associated with comfort
- Every two or three days, drop another breastfeed
- The second feed you replace, a few days later, should be at a different time. If you removed a feed in the mid-morning first, remove a feed in the mid-afternoon next.

### *Partial weaning:*

- Mother led
- Drop some breastfeeding sessions but keep breastfeeding for the rest of the time
- Works well if you are going back to work outside the home but still want to breastfeed in the mornings and evenings.

**How to partially wean:**

- Drop the chosen breastfeeds and replace with other foods and drinks including expressed breastmilk
- Does not have to be permanent
- May vary from day to day
- If you want to add more breastfeeds back into a day, you can bring up your supply by offering the breast more often

***Abrupt or sudden weaning:***

- Mother led
- May occur if you need to stop breastfeeding suddenly because of medications or illness ( See *Breastfeeding and medications* fact sheet)
- Speak with your physician and a breastfeeding expert to discuss if breastfeeding must be stopped
- Avoid a sudden stop to breastfeeding if you can

**How to suddenly wean:**

- Call *Mother Risk* at 416-813-6780 if you are unsure whether a medication you are taking is safe while breastfeeding. Most medications are safe to take while breastfeeding. See *Medications and breastfeeding* fact sheet
- If you only need to stop breastfeeding for a short time, continue to express milk with a pump or by hand to keep up your supply so that your baby can begin breastfeeding again once you are both able. See *Expressing your breastmilk* fact sheet
- Cold cloths may be applied to your breasts to reduce swelling
- Avoid tight bras, or binding your breasts
- Watch for signs of infection: fever, redness on the breast, flu-like symptoms
- There are no safe medications that you can take to decrease milk supply

***Alternative to sudden weaning***

Can stop putting your baby to the breast but continue to express breastmilk for a period of time to let your supply decrease slowly and make you more comfortable

- Can hand express or use a pump
- Express breastmilk less often and remove less milk over days or weeks and your breastmilk supply will slowly decrease

## *Weaning your toddler*

An older baby or toddler continues to receive the nutritional benefits of breastmilk. However, the physical and emotional closeness that breastfeeding offers is often what the child misses most when weaning from the breast. It is important that families give this comfort in other ways while weaning.

### **How to wean your older baby or toddler:**

- ***“Don’t Offer, Don’t Refuse”:*** Breastfeed whenever your child asks, but don’t offer when the child does not ask
- ***Set limits:*** Talk with your child to set limits on feeding times, length of feeds or places. Choose what works for you.
- ***Change daily routines:*** Children often have special times or locations which they associate with breastfeeding. Change your routine so your child is not reminded of the breastfeed he is missing. Distractions may include a trip to the park or a friend’s house, reading to your child, or playing. Healthy, age appropriate solid foods and drink can replace breast milk.
- ***Have your child spend time with other family members:*** Having your child spend close time with Dad or another trusted adult when they would normally breastfeed may be reassuring and distract your child from his breastfeeding routine. Ensure that you still provide your child with extra attention and physical contact at non-breastfeeding times throughout the day so that your child is still receiving a special comfort and closeness from you
- ***Substitute other shared activities:*** Offer other activities such as cuddling while reading a book, holding hands, rocking in a chair together. This gives your child other ways to be with you and feel loved while they give up breastfeeding

