

WEANING YOUR BREASTFEEDING CHILD

You may wonder how long to breastfeed* your child. Breastfeeding continues to be a valuable source of nutrition and disease protection for both mother and child, for as long as breastfeeding continues. “Weaning” is a personal decision that considers the needs of both the parent and child. The following information will help you make decisions that work for your family.

* The terms breast milk/breastfed/breastfeeding are widely used, but human milk/chestfed/chestfeeding can be used interchangeably. The terms mother/maternal are meant to be inclusive of all parents, caregivers, and significant others.

HOW LONG IS BREASTFEEDING RECOMMENDED?

International and Canadian health agencies, including the Canadian Paediatric Society and York Region Public Health recommend that:

- Babies need only breastmilk for the first six months
- At six months, babies begin to eat solid foods and continue to breastfeed for up to two years and beyond

WHAT IS WEANING?

- When a baby stops breastfeeding or drinking breastmilk
- It is a normal stage in development – all children eventually stop breastfeeding

NURSING STRIKES

A baby who “weans themselves” before 12 months of age is very unusual. These periods are referred to as nursing strikes. Nursing strikes can almost always be overcome! A registered nurse or breastfeeding expert can help you and your child continue breastfeeding after a nursing strike. Call York Region Health Connection for more information and support.

WHEN DO I WEAN MY CHILD?

- There is no “right” age to wean
- Weaning happens when you and your child are ready

IF I DECIDE TO WEAN, WHAT DO I FEED MY CHILD IN PLACE OF BREASTMILK?

This will depend upon your child’s age. Under six months of age, if not breastfeeding directly or feeding expressed breastmilk, offer any basic, 0-12 months, commercial infant formula. If your child is older, it is best to speak with your health care professional or call York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653 to speak to a registered nurse or chat live at york.ca/NurseChat

HOW DO I WEAN MY CHILD?

There are different ways to wean. Find the method that is right for you and your child, or just let it happen naturally.

NATURAL WEANING

- Is child-led
- Occurs when a child slowly shows less interest in breastfeeding over a number of weeks or months
- Will vary in age from child to child, just like when they learn to walk or talk
- Occurs somewhere after two years of age
- Lets your child outgrow the need at their own rate until they no longer breastfeed

PUBLIC HEALTH

1-800-361-5653

TTY: 1-866-512-6228

york.ca/breastfeeding

GRADUAL PLANNED WEANING

- Is parent-led, over weeks or months
- Gradually replaces breastfeeding with other appropriate nutrition
- 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

How to gradually wean:

- Start by dropping one breastfeed per day and replace this feed with other age-appropriate foods and drinks
- Drop your child's least favourite breastfeed first – favourite feeds are usually when your child first wakes up in the morning or just before bedtime
- Allow at least 3 days before dropping another feed at a different time. If you removed a feed mid-morning first, remove a feed mid-afternoon next

Note: If breasts feel full and uncomfortable, hand express for comfort

PARTIAL WEANING

- Is parent-led
- Allows parents to drop some breastfeeding sessions but keep breastfeeding for the rest of the time
- Works well for those going back to work outside the home but who still want to breastfeed in the mornings and evenings

How to partially wean:

- Drop the chosen breastfeeds and replace with other age appropriate foods and drinks, including expressed milk
- The frequency and time of day you breastfeed may vary from day to day
- If you want to add more breastfeeds back into a day, offer the breast more often

ABRUPT OR SUDDEN WEANING

- Is parent-led
- May be more stressful for parent and child
- May occur if breastfeeding needs to be stopped suddenly because of medications, sudden illness or informed choice. Speak with your health care professional to find out if breastfeeding really must be stopped. Most medications are safe to take while breastfeeding

How to suddenly wean:

- Apply cold cloths or packs to your breasts to reduce swelling. Avoid tight bras, or binding your breasts
- Try hand expression to remove small amounts of milk if breasts become uncomfortable
- Watch for signs of infection: fever, redness on the breast, or flu-like symptoms. See your health care professional right away if these symptoms occur
- There are no safe medications to decrease milk supply
- **If you only need to stop breastfeeding for a short time, continue to express milk by hand or with a pump to keep up your supply, so that your child can begin breastfeeding again once you are both able. Be sure to follow direction from your health care professional on whether milk expressed during this time should be discarded**

ALTERNATIVE TO SUDDEN WEANING

You can stop putting your child 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

STRATEGIES FOR WEANING YOUR 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 locations for feeds. 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 they are missing
- Have your child spend time with other family members: Having your child spend close time with your family or another trusted adult when they would normally breastfeed may be reassuring and distract your child from the usual breastfeeding routine

HEALTH CONNECTION

Breastfeeding is important for the health of you and your child. York Region Public Health offers free infant feeding assistance and support. To speak with a registered nurse, registered dietitian or to book a virtual or in-person clinic appointment, contact Health Connection for free, confidential information, advice and resources, Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.. After hours, leave a message, we will contact you during operating hours. Call: 1-800-361-5653 TTY: 1-866-512-6228 Live chat: york.ca/NurseChat Visit york.ca/HealthConnection

You can also call 811 to speak with a registered nurse 24/7 or chat live at ontario.ca/health811