

## Baby-Led Weaning



Baby-led weaning introduces your baby to solid foods by giving soft, cut-up finger foods starting at six months old. It began in the United Kingdom where weaning means “starting solids”, not stopping breast or bottle feeding. It encourages babies to feed themselves.

### What are the benefits of baby-led weaning?

Baby-led weaning lets babies hold onto soft strips or pieces of food and bring it to their mouth.

- Parents stay close to their babies while they are eating, but do not help them get food into their mouth. Parents can enjoy their own meal while keeping a watchful eye on their baby.
- Babies can feed themselves and there is no pressure from caregivers to eat.
- Babies are in control of feeding and can stop eating when they are full or continue to eat if they are hungry.
- Babies can use all five senses: taste, touch, smell, sight and hearing, to explore the food while eating.

At first, babies may only eat a little and might play with the food. Eventually, babies will use their gums to break down the food into smaller pieces to swallow.

### What are the concerns with baby-led weaning?

#### 1. Higher risk of choking. To prevent choking:

- Give foods that are soft and can be mashed on the roof of a mouth with a tongue.
- Make sure the food pieces are longer than your baby's hand.
- Toast bread and cut into strips. Do not give soft bread.
- Do not give hard vegetables or fruit. Cook until soft and cut into strips.

- Cut round or oval foods into smaller pieces or mash them with a fork (for example, cut grapes into quarters, mash kidney beans or berries).
- Always watch babies when they are eating.

*Babies may gag on food when they try to eat. This is part of learning to swallow. Gagging is not the same as choking. Choking blocks the airway. In babies, the gag reflex is closer to the middle of the tongue. This helps the baby spit or cough food out.*

## 2. Not eating enough iron-rich foods or calories for growth.

This is because the variety and amounts of food that babies can feed themselves can be limited. Between six and eight months old, babies are still learning to eat. It takes time and practice! To help your baby get enough calories and iron, you can also feed some foods with a spoon. Try iron-fortified baby cereals, mashed beans and lentils and minced meats.

*Help your baby use a spoon! Put cereal, mashed or minced food on a spoon and give the spoon to your baby to feed herself.*

## How do I start baby-led weaning safely?

**During meals, offer soft, cut-up finger foods that your baby can hold with a fist.** At six months, babies use their whole hand to pick things up. Around eight or nine months, babies can pick things up with their thumb and pointer finger. Start with a variety of iron-rich foods such as meat, poultry, fish, tofu and beans.

## What are some soft foods I can offer my baby?

- Firm tofu, in pieces
- Meatballs made from ground beef, chicken, turkey, lamb or pork cut in half (or ground meat formed into a finger shape)
- Wedges of hard-boiled egg or strips of scrambled egg or omelet
- Pieces of cooked or canned fish (remove bones)
- Mashed chickpeas or beans
- Soft-cooked vegetables, such as green beans, carrot strips or spears of broccoli
- Strips of cheese
- Mashed berries
- Oven-baked sweet potato or potato fries without skin
- Pieces of soft fruit such as banana, avocado or mango
- Pancakes made with foods such as lentils, brown rice, infant cereal, quinoa or oats. See the recipe on the next page.

*Mashed foods can be put on a spoon or formed into a ball or finger shape.*

*If foods are slippery, like cut-up fruit or mashed foods, roll them in dry infant cereal so they are easier to hold.*

- Pancakes made with grated zucchini or beets with flour and egg
- Strips of wholegrain toast with very thinly spread nut butter or thinly spread hummus

### **Is there something wrong with feeding my baby with a spoon?**

Spoon feeding is a safe and reliable way of feeding your baby. Let your baby decide what to eat and how much to eat. Babies will be better eaters in the future if they are not forced to eat or denied food. Eat as a family and remember to offer more textures (such as minced, grated, diced, and finger foods) as soon as your baby is seven months. Let babies feed themselves by nine months.

**You don't have to choose one way of feeding your baby over another.** If you try baby-led weaning, you can also feed some foods with a spoon at the same time.

### **Bottom Line**

No matter how you introduce solid foods, it is important to wait until your baby shows signs of developmental readiness, usually around six months old. Talk to your health care provider if you are having trouble introducing solids. Ask if baby-led weaning may be a good option for your baby.



## Infant Cereal Pancakes

Pancakes are easy for babies to grab and eat. Use any type of leftover cooked grain you have on hand and make them for the whole family. Babies learn best when eating what everyone else is eating in the family.



1 banana, mashed  
¼ cup or 50 mL infant cereal  
1 egg  
¼ cup or 50 mL water, milk, infant formula or breast milk

1. Mix the ingredients with a whisk, mixer or in a blender or food processor.
2. Add a small amount of oil to a frying pan.
3. Heat the pan to a medium temperature.
4. Pour a small amount of the pancake mixture into the pan. Once the mixture starts to bubble, flip the pancake and cook the other side.

### Tip:

- Add water to thin out peanut butter and use it as a dip for the pancakes.

### Substitutions:

- Use cooked red lentils, brown rice, quinoa or any type of flour instead of infant cereal.
- Use ½ cup of rolled oats instead of infant cereal.

### More Information:

- Healthy Child Manitoba - Feeding Your Baby, 6 months to 1 year  
[https://www.manitoba.ca/healthychild/healthybaby/hb\\_solidfoods.pdf](https://www.manitoba.ca/healthychild/healthybaby/hb_solidfoods.pdf)

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1-877-830-2892  
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