

Baby-led Weaning- Topic of the Month

FEBRUARY 5, 2025

Baby-led weaning is a feeding approach that allows babies to self-feed from the beginning of introduction to solids. This method may offer a range of nutritional advantages for infants and toddlers. Explore the world of baby-led weaning by reviewing this topic of the month.



What is baby-led weaning?

Baby-led weaning (also called BLW) is one approach to adding complementary food to an infant's diet when they are ready to transition from consuming only breastmilk or formula. The term baby-led weaning was coined in 2008 by public health nurse Gill Rapley and has become a popular method for parents to introduce new foods.

Baby-led weaning allows the infant to self-feed using their hands or a utensil to explore and choose the foods they want to touch, feel, taste, and ultimately bring to their mouth. It remains the parents' role to choose which foods are offered to the infant.

How does baby-led weaning work?

The goal behind baby-led weaning is that the infant would begin self-feeding while continuing to consume breastmilk or formula. Provided the infant has shown developmental signs of readiness for solids (sits with support, good head and neck control, reaches for foods), this would begin at about six months of age. The infant would be offered small portions of appropriate foods, sitting with the family in a highchair as the infant self-feeds. The infant is allowed to explore their food and self-regulate how much they choose to take in. This may start with one meal a day and progress to more meals as the infant begins to take in more foods. The

expectation is that it will be messy. Mealtime is complete when the infant shows signs of fullness.

Note: Current recommendations suggest offering a new, single-ingredient food every one to two days to reach the goal of 100 new foods by one year. This should include high allergy risk foods at or before six months (eggs, milk/dairy, peanuts/tree nuts, fish/shellfish, wheat, soy, sesame). Encourage families to consult with their physician for guidance on food introduction for infants with a greater risk of developing food allergies.

Benefits of baby-led weaning

Proponents of baby-led weaning have touted many benefits to the popular feeding method on social media, in books, online articles, and podcasts. Some of the benefits include:

- Allows babies to explore a wide variety of whole foods versus pureed jars or pouches.
- May help reduce picky eating behaviors by exposing babies to a diverse range of flavors and textures early on.
- Encourages independence with feeding, which allows baby to respond to cues of hunger and satiety.
- Lowers risk for food allergies by introducing foods early and often.
- Improves fine motor skills while pinching or grasping the food, handling the spoon, chewing, and swallowing.
- Develops a healthy relationship with foods and encourages family mealtimes.

Note: While the benefits are encouraging, it is important that parents understand the appropriate methods for introducing new foods safely and ensuring that nutrition needs are being met while also knowing the risks.

Risks of baby-led weaning

Baby-led weaning can be a safe method of introducing of solid foods when done properly, but there are some associated risks that parents should be aware of.

- **Choking** risks come with introducing new textures to infants. Parents will want to know the difference between choking and gagging. They should never allow their child to eat alone.
- **Growth faltering** can occur when the child is not getting enough calories to sustain their growing needs.
- **Anemia** may be possible if the new eater is having difficulty with chewing and swallowing certain iron rich foods.
- **Nutritional deficiency** can become a concern if fruits and vegetables become the main staple, and infants miss out on iron or other vitamins and minerals.

WIC's role

Education for introducing solids focuses on the infant's developmental readiness for foods and best practices for advancing textures. If a parent is interested in using baby-led weaning methods, WIC staff can assist the parent on choosing nutritious foods that the infant can safely self-feed.

During the nutrition assessment, explore how foods are being introduced, what foods are being offered, and what textures the infant prefers. During the nutrition education portion of the appointment, offer tips and tools to support the development of healthy eating habits.

Tip: According to the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025](#), parents should avoid foods with added salt or sugar when introducing solids to infants. Additional recommendations include a focus on iron and zinc rich foods such as meats, seafood, eggs, tofu, and nut butters for fully breastfed infants.

Support healthy eating habits

Healthy eating starts at a young age, and habits are born through repetition and practice. By sitting together for meals, families can model behaviors that build the foundation for a lifetime of healthy habits. Additionally, when children are allowed to self-feed, they gain independence and autonomy in the feeding process.

Benefits of healthy eating habits:

- Self-regulate the appetite and being able to stop when full.
- Develop fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and oral-motor function.
- Chew and manipulate solid foods to improve nutrient bioavailability.
- Foster an intuitive relationship with food from an early age.
- Reduce the risk of fussy eating and food aversions later in life.

Appropriate textures, sizes, and amounts

When starting any new food, texture is the key consideration. Parents will want to ensure that they are offering a soft, smooth consistency that is easy for the child to chew and swallow. The sizes should be small enough for them to pick up with their little hands. Offering one to two teaspoon size servings to begin is plenty.

Tip: Baby-led weaning can include the parent pre-loading a spoon with a WIC pureed infant food and offering the spoon to the child to self-feed. Pureed foods can also be mixed with table foods to create a smoother texture. Check out [WIC Infant Food Recipes](#) for ideas.

Below are free resources that can be shared with parents that may support the introduction of solids foods.

MN WIC nutrition education cards:

- [Finger Foods for Baby \(PDF\)](#)
- [Introducing Solid Foods \(PDF\)](#)
- [Choosing Meats & Textures \(PDF\)](#)

Partnership for a Healthier America [Free Resources for Clinicians and Champions of First Foods:](#)

- [Raising Adventurous Eaters with First Foods - Safe Eating Tips](#)
- [Raising Adventurous Eaters with First Foods - 4-6 Months](#)
- [Raising Adventurous Eaters with First Foods - 6-9 Months](#)

Tip: It may take up to eight to ten exposures for an infant to accept a new food.

Takeaway

Baby-led weaning can be a safe method of introducing solids foods when done properly. Educating parents on a child's signs of readiness for solids and the importance of safety when beginning new foods will help them to introduce solids safely to their youngest family member. Lastly, encourage parents to offer nutrient dense foods that limit added sugar and salt to ensure that the infants nutritional needs are being met.

Resources

[Baby-Led Weaning: Is It Safe?](#) (Healthychildren.org Dec. 3, 2024)

[Use of the Baby-Led Weaning \(BLW\) Method in Complementary Feeding of the Infant—A Cross-Sectional Study of Mothers Using and Not Using the BLW Method](#) (National Library of Medicine, Jun. 8, 2022)

[Free Resources for Clinicians and Champions of First Foods](#) (Partnership for A Healthier America, 2025)- Resources are available to download in English and Spanish.

Prerecorded: 8 Easy Ways to Offer Infants High Iron Foods; found on the [Minnesota Department of Health \(MDH\) Learning Center](#). (MDH WIC, 2022)

Reference- complete list of hyperlinks:

[Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025](#)

(www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans-2020-2025.pdf)

[WIC Infant Food Recipes](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/recipes/infantfoods.html) (www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/recipes/infantfoods.html)

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[Finger Foods for Baby](#)

(www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/inffingerfoods.pdf)

[Introducing Solid Foods](#)

(www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/infintrosolids.pdf)

[Choosing Meats & Textures](#)

(www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/inftextures.pdf)

[Free Resources for Clinicians and Champions of First Foods](#)

(www.ahealthieramerica.org/articles/free-resources-for-clinicians-and-champions-of-first-foods-981)

[Minnesota Department of Health \(MDH\) Learning Center](#)

(www.health.state.mn.us/about/tools/learningcenter.html)

[Raising Adventurous Eaters with First Foods - Safe Eating Tips](#) (pha-

cms.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/168/0deee819-0cd0-4b6a-b46b-fac7bf6f453f.pdf?1667961764)

[Raising Adventurous Eaters with First Foods - 4-6 Months](#) (pha-

cms.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/164/693691b6-a36d-4528-b463-0a9f030cf317.pdf?1667961324)

[Raising Adventurous Eaters with First Foods - 6-9 Months](#) (pha-

cms.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/165/ac8c1865-e643-447a-86e7-82491996757e.pdf?1667961477)

[Baby-Led Weaning: Is It Safe?](#) ([www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/baby-led-weaning-is-it-](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/baby-led-weaning-is-it-safe.aspx#:~:text=What%20are%20the%20benefits%20of,a%20spoon%2C%20chewing%20and%20swallowing.)

[safe.aspx#:~:text=What%20are%20the%20benefits%20of,a%20spoon%2C%20chewing%20and%20swallowing.](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/baby-led-weaning-is-it-safe.aspx#:~:text=What%20are%20the%20benefits%20of,a%20spoon%2C%20chewing%20and%20swallowing.))

[Use of the Baby-Led Weaning \(BLW\) Method in Complementary Feeding of the Infant—A Cross-Sectional Study of Mothers Using and Not Using the BLW Method](#)

(pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9227137/#:~:text=3.3.,mothers%20using%20the%20BLW%20method.)

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