Baby-Led Weaning

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Baby-led weaning really just means baby-led feeding. It doesn't have anything to do with weaning your baby from human milk or formula. It means having your baby go right from breast/chestfeeding or bottle feeding to feeding themself foods that are cut in small pieces or mashed up. With baby-led weaning, caregivers do not spoon-feed pureed baby food. This approach lets caregivers feed the baby what other family members are eating (within reason). Here are some questions and answers about this approach.

WHAT AGE IS BEST TO START BABY-LED WEANING?

Babies should be at least 6 months old to begin exploring solid food. Check in with your primary pediatric provider if you feel your baby needs to start solids before this age.

WHY BABY-LED WEANING?

This self-feeding method is a personal choice. Some families use this approach to save money by not buying jarred baby food. With baby-led weaning your baby learns about foods by exploring them with their hands and mouth. It may allow babies to better develop eye-hand coordination or reduce power struggles about food. Some say baby-led weaning may reduce picky eating or that it helps babies to stop eating when they are full. However, there is no clear evidence to support these claims.

WHEN SHOULD I TRY IT?

Your baby may be ready for solid foods when they can sit without support. They should also be able to keep their head steady and reach out to grab things. Other signs that your baby is ready are if they pull things toward their mouth or show interest in your food.

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WHAT SHOULD BABY'S FIRST FOODS BE?

Soft foods like smashed banana and avocado are good choices. So are well-cooked, finely cut vegetables like carrot or potato. Do not give any hard foods such as popcorn or nuts. Start with a small amount of food. Be sure to try a variety of foods to ensure your baby gets the nutrients they need.

DON'T I NEED TO WAIT UNTIL MY BABY HAS TEETH?

No! Babies' gums are quite hard. They can "chew" many foods as long as they are not a choking hazard. Some examples of foods that can be choking hazards for babies include banana or hot dogs cut into rounds, whole grapes, or sticky foods like peanut butter.

ARE THERE ANY DOWNSIDES TO BABY-LED WEANING?

It can be messy! There is a risk of choking as babies learn to self-feed. Only offer babies small pieces of food. If you are feeding baby what the family is eating it may be harder to keep track of problem foods for babies who have a family history of allergies.

ANY OTHER TIPS FOR BABY-LED WEANING?

Yes! Always watch your baby when they are eating. Have your baby sit upright and stay close while they are eating. Do this even if you think the foods do not pose a choking hazard. Learn infant CPR and choke saving skills (how to do back blows and chest thrusts). You can always do a combination of self- and spoon-feeding. Do what works for you and your baby.

SCAN FOR MORE INFO

References

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