Weaning

HealthySteps®
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A Program of ZERO TO THREE

Deciding if and when to wean—to stop breastfeeding/chestfeeding—is a personal choice. There is no "right" age to wean. There are many reasons you may decide to wean, and there are plenty of reasons to continue. It is up to you to decide when. Babies and toddlers typically do better with weaning when it is a slow process, taking place over several months' time. Keep that in mind as you consider these tips.

SHIFT TO A "DON'T OFFER, DON'T REFUSE" APPROACH.

You can begin by simply not offering milk. Then wait and see how your child reacts. They may not think to ask for quite a while! This approach can stretch out the times between feedings. It can also help to wear high-necked clothing during this time to distract from that area.

PICK ONE FEEDING A DAY TO STOP AND TAPER.

Drop the feeding time that seems easiest to let go. If your baby has started solid foods, try stopping a feeding that can be "replaced" with a meal. Once your baby or toddler has adjusted to the loss of one feeding you can pick another one to phase out. The feeding right before nap or bedtime may be the hardest to stop!

IF STOPPING A FEEDING DOESN'T GO WELL, TRY SHORTENING IT.

Stopping a feeding time may bring a big reaction from your child. If so, try shortening the time for the feeding by 5-10 minutes. Shorten more each time until you can eliminate the feeding.

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EXPECT AND PREPARE FOR STRUGGLE—YOUR BABY'S AND YOUR OWN.

It's normal for babies and toddlers to resist changes to their routine. Be prepared for some fussing. Try to be patient and offer soothing words. Try to meet their needs another way. Perhaps offer something to drink, attention, or a cuddle. It might also be hard for you! It is common to feel sad and grieve the loss of the breastfeeding/chestfeeding relationship.

FILL FEEDING TIMES WITH OTHER FUN AND ACTIVITIES.

Distraction can help! Try a little roughhousing, singing songs, or doing fingerplays. If you can, stop feeding times that you can replace with other activities. Skip the mid-morning feed and head out for a walk instead.

LEAN ON OTHER ADULT MEMBERS OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD DURING WEANING.

Get others on board with your plan. Ask them to keep your baby or toddler busy with other things. If nap time is too hard without the regular feeding, ask Grandma, Dad, or Auntie to offer a bottle or a snuggle.

SCAN FOR MORE INFO

References

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