

Benefits of Baby-led Weaning

Baby-led Weaning (BLW) is a term used to describe infant self-feeding right from the start. It does not involve spoon feeding pureed baby food into a baby's mouth; rather, baby feeds herself strips of soft foods she can pick up and bring to her own mouth. BLW also encourages use of hands and loaded utensils to self-feed all safe textures. This doesn't mean that BLW is appropriate for every child or family - "traditional feeding" may still be the choice that's best for you. Below are some BLW benefits from the standpoint of two feeding professionals.

- ✓ BLW promotes family meals since everyone eats the same food at the same time. More family meals = more modeling good eating habits for baby = better eating habits long-term.
- ✓ Self-feeding encourages a developmentally-appropriate progression of skills. By 6 months of age, your baby has been practicing hand-to-mouth skills for months and can now utilize these skills with food. He has watched family members feed themselves and now can try it, too.
- ✓ Per available research, BLW is as safe as Traditional Feeding (when non-choking hazard foods are offered) and may help prevent picky eating.
- ✓ BLW teaches your baby to eat the amount of food that is appropriate for her body and not learn over-eating. She is in control of how much food is eaten and continues to listen to hunger and fullness cues, a pattern established early in life with responsive breast or bottle feeding. Parents learn to continue trusting their baby's innate ability to self-regulate with food.
- ✓ Self-feeding offers a sensory-rich eating experience that promotes tactile and messy play, which is so important in helping your baby learn to tolerate multiple textures and feelings on his hands.
- ✓ BLW allows babies to get plenty of breastmilk or formula while gradually experimenting with food and learning how to eat. Your baby's intake of real food will likely increase slowly, which allows her digestive system time to gradually adjust to food.
- ✓ Self-feeding develops multiple fine-motor and oral-motor skills (including chewing) and introduces your baby to a wide variety of flavors, textures and shapes of food that help develop a more diverse palate. Your baby doesn't need teeth to chew - teeth are underneath the gum surface!
- ✓ Current recommendations on allergy prevention advise introduction of allergenic foods by around 6 months of age. Many allergenic foods, like shellfish and finned fish, are more appetizing in their whole form (not pureed). Furthermore, meat - a recommended first food for its well-digested iron - is tastier eaten as softly cooked strips, patties or ground meat versus pureed meat.
- ✓ The goal for all babies is to self-feed all safe foods by no later than 12-14 months (barring medical or developmental issues). With BLW, parents don't have to "transition" to self-feeding.
- ✓ BLW promotes development of body awareness (location of mouth, location of gag reflex) and allows baby to "map" his own mouth so he is familiar with where food goes when eating.
- ✓ Sitting at the table with family helps your baby develop social, language, visual, and postural control skills. Baby learns about mealtime routines, customs, manners and how her family acts at a table.
- ✓ For many families, BLW is easier! Your baby eats what the family eats (with a few considerations). There's no need to buy special foods or baby food makers. Parents can focus on the whole family - and their own food - at mealtime.