

# Weaning: All Good Things Come to an End

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All good things come to an end, even breastfeeding. When is the right time to wean? How do you wean? And how do you handle the feelings of loss?

## **When to Wean**

Barring medical or other physical reasons, the correct time to wean is ... whenever you want to wean. Seriously. There is no “right” or “wrong” time to wean your child.

The American Academy of Pediatrics for breastfeeding [recommends](#) , “Exclusive breastfeeding for approximately the first six months and support for breastfeeding for the first year and beyond as long as mutually desired by mother and child.” I won’t address what I’ll refer to as “premature weaning” that occurs for medical or other compelling reasons.

The weaning process is, of necessity, a very personal one and is not subject to anyone else’s opinion of when the time is right. Even though some people will freely give their advice – whether you’ve asked for it or not – the decision and the process is entirely up to you.

When you are ready to wean or your child is showing less interest in nursing, then the time is right for you. During her first year, a child will go through periods of decreased interest in nursing:

- 4 to 5 months ... growing interest in her surroundings may distract her
- 4 to 6 months ... teething may make her fretful (no, she can’t bite you if she’s latched on correctly, so no worries there)
- 5 to 6 months ... heightened sensitivity in your baby may make her much more distractible than earlier
- 6 to 12 months ... easily distracted and busy learning gross motor skills; also, by this point, she has become a master nurser and can drink a lot of milk in less time

So, let's say that your baby has celebrated his first birthday and you're ready to consider weaning. How do you go about it?

## **The Easiest Way to Wean**

Simply put, the easiest way to wean is to let it happen naturally, gradually, and over time. This is one time when an all-or-nothing approach is truly the wrong way to go.

## **The Most Difficult Way to Wean**

Abruptly stopping breastfeeding is the most difficult for both mother and child. The mother's breasts will continue producing milk, which will lead to engorgement and possibly mastitis and abscesses. Her hormone production will also shift abruptly, which can lead to depression, a potentially serious medical condition that shouldn't be confused with feeling sad or a little down.

Abrupt weaning can be traumatic to a nursing child, who equates nursing with love, comfort, and closeness. Webster's dictionary defines wean as "to accustom (as a child) to take food otherwise than by nursing." Weaning really is a process that is best accomplished over time.

## **How to Wean**

Sometimes your child makes the decision to wean, and things go pretty smoothly, with fewer and fewer requests to nurse. You can also eliminate one nursing session per day over a period of weeks. In just a month or two, you'll be down to just one or two feedings a day.

You can change your daily routines so that they're less centered on nursing. If your baby is drinking from a cup and eating food, you can anticipate and preempt requests for nursing by offering food or drink. You can also delay or postpone nursing sessions, which will help reduce the total daily number.

On the other hand, some children are quite happy nursing and will continue to nurse, more for comfort than for nourishment, for quite some time. My younger son was an enthusiastic nurser, and it was a real challenge weaning him, even though he was nearly 3 years old. With him, distraction was often effective, as was dressing in a closet (I'm serious). Eventually he did wean, and the only trauma to anyone was to me, whenever he flushed me out of whichever closet I was dressing in.

## **The Ultimate Outcome**

Your baby will wean, eventually. The growth from nursing to weaning is a baby's natural path from dependence to independence. All good things come to an end, it's true. But weaning isn't a time for sadness. Each stage in your child's growth and development is

full of wonder, and nursing is just the first of many in store for the both of you. Just wait and see what's around the next bend.

*Laurel Haring is a writer and editor. She lives with her family in Delaware. Laurel's experiences weaning her sons were self-weaning for the older at about 1 year of age and prolonged, encouraged, bargained for weaning for the younger, at nearly 3 years of age. She can still put on her bra remarkably quickly.*

<http://www.typeamom.net/weaning:-all-good-things-come-to-an-end.html>