

Breastfeeding Toddlers

Why to continue and how to
stop



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My personal breastfeeding and weaning journeys:

- ▶ Twins - weaned at roughly 14 months as I thought you were supposed to stop at a year
- ▶ Baby no 3 - self weaned at 3 yrs 3 months
- ▶ Baby no 4 - came to a sort of mutual arrangement at 3 years 11 months due to my aversion.



- ▶ As a species, humans are designed to breastfeed their babies past one year, into toddlerhood and beyond. This is the biological norm for primates.
- ▶ Research shows that if human babies are left to their own devices they generally self wean somewhere between 2 years and 4 years of age. Self weaning rarely happens before 18 months, but children can sometimes continue to 7 and beyond

Why when a baby stops breastfeeding before a year it is not classed as self-weaning?

- ▶ Nursing strike - It is fairly common for babies of around 9 or 10 months of age to experience a nursing strike. A nursing strike is a sudden, usually temporary stop, usually due to an outside influence, perhaps illness, teething or a shock.
- ▶ Low supply - Sometimes when the parent is back to work and not pumping, supply can be low and the baby may decide not to breastfeed
- ▶ Alternatives - some babies may be having other milk from other vessels or perhaps they are eating a lot of food and drinking water. Parents may be weaning some feeds and offering alternatives.
- ▶ Changing feeding patterns - older babies and toddlers like to breastfeed for connection, comfort and regulation. It is often less about food and drink at this stage

Why Continue Breastfeeding Past 1 year?



Why Continuing Past 1 year is not for everyone?

Feeling
touched out

“Need body
back”

Cuddles

Fiddling

Aversion

Sleep!

Biting

Acrobatic
feeding

Breastfeeding toddlers can be a bit crazy





► Myths



What myths have you
heard about breastfeeding
past 1 year?



“When they can ask for it,
they are too old to breastfeed”

- ▶ Babies have been asking to be breastfed since birth
- ▶ They gradually learn more communication skills
- ▶ Feeding cues and crying
- ▶ Baby signing
- ▶ Words

It is weird!

- ▶ Actually, it is not weird at all
- ▶ As a species we are designed to breastfeed past 1 year, on into toddlerhood and beyond
- ▶ Human offspring, if left to their own devices, tend to self wean between 2 years and 7 years of age, most commonly between 2.5 and 4 years
- ▶ WHO recommends to breastfeed “2 years and beyond” alongside solid foods.
- ▶ In non-Western cultures it is common to breastfeed for much longer

They will remember it

- ▶ Firstly, what is wrong with that?
- ▶ Secondly, actually they often don't remember. But if they do they remember it as a gentle and nurturing time.

They will be teased

- ▶ Breastfeeding toddlers tends to happen in the house, at bedtime, nighttime, early morning, so it is often not noticeable.
- ▶ Children themselves do not generally talk about breastfeeding as it is just a normal thing for them

They will never sleep

- ▶ Night weaning does not guarantee better sleep. For some children, stopping breastfeeding at night does not stop them waking and then they have lost that quick and easy way to settle a them back to sleep
- ▶ There are some who night wean and begin to sleep longer stretches
- ▶ There are some who night wean, and it takes a whils for them to sleep longer stretches.
- ▶ Night waking is very much dependent on the child's natural temperament and personality type.

It will rot their teeth

- ▶ Dentists often suggest to night wean.
- ▶ Babies that bottle feed in the night do have an increased risk of dental caries, milk pools on the teeth and formula or cows milk do not contain antibodies which help protect from decay.
- ▶ Breastfeeding helps prevent malocclusion, less likely to need braces or correction of their bite.
- ▶ Breast milk contains lots of factors that help prevent the growth of bacteria and helps prevent it sticking to the teeth.
- ▶ There are studies that suggest a link, but they are not robust
- ▶ Humans in the past had little dental decay - likely modern diet the cause

Breastfeeding makes them “too attached”

- ▶ We know well, due to years and years of research about attachment theory, that in order for our small humans to develop into well rounded adults who are able to make trusting relationships and have as happy a life as possible, begin securely attached to their primary carer, or as close to that as possible, is essential.
- ▶ There is not such thing as “too attached”
- ▶ It is normal for toddlers to experience separation anxiety, display clingy behaviour when they are unsure of themselves, and have a preference for their main carer.

It is child abuse/sexual abuse

- ▶ Breastfeeding is not sexual - end of.

The background of the slide features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of green, ranging from light lime to dark forest green. These shapes are primarily located on the right side and bottom of the frame, creating a modern, layered effect.

All children will
self-wean eventually

They will not need to breastfeed
to sleep at university



▶ Gentle Parent-Led Weaning from the breast

Milk needs for toddlers when weaned

- ▶ They could replace a couple of breastfeeds with some cow's milk or non-dairy milk alternative
- ▶ If they do not like to drink milk, prioritise calcium rich foods.
- ▶ No need for toddler formula milk
- ▶ Use a cup, move away from bottles after 1 year



Have a think about the different reasons a toddler may breastfeed

- ▶ Hint - it's not so much about the milk!

The main “types” of toddler breastfeed

- ▶ Short “check-in” feed
 - ▶ Injury - pain relief/shock
 - ▶ Regulation/Meltdown prevention
 - ▶ Feed to sleep for a nap
 - ▶ Hunger/thirst
 - ▶ Reunion feed
 - ▶ Feed to sleep at bedtime
 - ▶ Night feeds
-
- ▶ Each needs a different approach for weaning



How to wean -

Short check-in feed

- ▶ Short check-in feeds are generally when a toddler is busy doing something, runs over for a quick feed before going back to doing something after a few sucks.
- ▶ It can be to do with hydration, so offer water
- ▶ It is more likely to do with connection and feeling safe.
- ▶ Offer in this in another way, like a cuddle, and explain that they can breastfeed later.
- ▶ It can be good to aim for a mid-morning and mid-afternoon feed at this point so you can explain they can have it a bit later

How to wean - Injury - pain relief/shock

- ▶ Similar to the check-in feed, this is usually to feel safe and secure when they have hurt themselves, with added pain relief of breastfeeding!
- ▶ It is ok to wean this type of feed later as it can be useful. But if the breastfeeding parent feels it is time to stop, then offer comfort with a cuddle, distraction to help them think about something else, pain relief if needed if injury is quite serious.

How to wean - Regulation/meltdown

- ▶ Toddlers have a lot of big feelings for such a small person.
- ▶ Breastfeeding is a wonderful way of regulating a child who is feeling overwhelmed, anxious or cross about the world.
- ▶ To wean this type of feed, they need to find other ways of regulating the child. Each child will have their own preferences so trying a few different things can help. Some are hyposensitive so need more sensory input, some are hypersensitive so need gentler input.
- ▶ Touch - some need deep pressure, others need a gentler touch
- ▶ Movement - some need swinging, swaying, turning upside-down, others need stillness and calm
- ▶ Naming and acknowledging emotions helps them feel heard

How to wean - Feed to sleep for nap

- ▶ The easiest way to wean from feeding to sleep for a nap is to go out of the house for naps
- ▶ Toddlers often settle to sleep easily in the pram/buggy, the car or in a carrier.
- ▶ Some children like a feed when they wake, either keep moving as they stir, or offer a drink and snack
- ▶ For naps in the house, lying with them on a floor bed or cuddling to sleep may work. Rocking may be necessary. Or you may be able to get them to sleep by rocking the pram/buggy or walking round the living room with it.
- ▶ Remember they do stop napping

How to wean - Hunger/thirst

- ▶ This is an easy one - offer a drink and/or snack



How to wean - Reunion feed

- ▶ A reunion feed is a feed after a longer period of separation, ie after work, or a few hours apart.
- ▶ This sort of feed is about reconnection.
- ▶ To wean this feed try to immediately do something fun with their child that they really enjoy. It has to be already set up or a very quick set up to distract them. Be fully present so that the toddler feels connected. Think “love bombing” and filling their love tank with their favourite things and activities.

How to wean - Feed to sleep bedtime

- ▶ The first step is to gently reduce and remove the feed to sleep association.
- ▶ Start by taking control of the end of the feed and ending it when the child is 99% asleep instead of 100%. They will then need some other settling tools to help them calm if they stir. Cuddling tight, patting bum, stroking hair, humming, singing etc
- ▶ Once that is working consistently, move the end of the feed back a little and use other associations to finish settling
- ▶ Once they are not feeding fully to sleep it is easier to either move the feed to another part of the bedtime routine, or stop the feed

How to wean - Night feeds

- ▶ Night weaning is a similar process to stopping the feed to sleep. It can be done at the same time, it can be done separately.
- ▶ Some like to night wean first but keep the feed to sleep. Others stop the feed to sleep to give more flexibility at bedtime but night wean later when they feel the child can cope with it better.
- ▶ First step is the same, take control of the end of the feed and use other tools if they stir
- ▶ Then offer a shorter feed and use other tools to finish settling
- ▶ At some point they will feel they need to take the plunge and stop offering

How to wean - Night feeds

- ▶ When the time comes to stop offering, or if they need to wean quickly for some reason there are some other steps:
- ▶ Talk to the child about how the breasts will be sleeping and will only wake in the morning
- ▶ Ask the child how they would prefer to settle back to sleep if breastfeeding is not available
- ▶ Remind them at bedtime
- ▶ When they wake, gently remind them again, offer other settling techniques

How to wean - Night feeds

- ▶ The child may become very upset.
- ▶ Offer other calming techniques
- ▶ Acknowledge they are sad/upset/angry but breasts are sleeping
- ▶ Focus on calming them down.
- ▶ If they are calm they will eventually settle.
- ▶ Be consistent and do the same if they wake again
- ▶ The first night will be the most challenging, they will begin to understand quickly
- ▶ Because the child is being supported through this mild trauma it will have no long term effects - this is not Cry It Out



How to wean - Night weaning myths

- ▶ Sending the partner in does not work well as when the child is with the breastfeeding parent, they will still expect to breastfeed
- ▶ Going away for a few days often does not work for the same reason, when the mother returns, the child immediately wants to breastfeed at night again.
- ▶ You do not need to offer milk in another way, it is not about the milk!
- ▶ However they may be thirsty, so offering some water could help.



Thank You!

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