

# Baby-Led Weaning

## What is Baby-Led Weaning?

Baby-led weaning is a method of introducing foods to infants in a manner which allows the infant to feed themselves. No purees found here.

- Caretaker decides which foods to offer and prepares them, so they are ready for baby to eat.
- Baby decides what and how much they eat of what is offered.
- Baby eats during family meals, eating some of the same foods that are an appropriate size, shape, and/or texture.
- Baby's main source of calories and nutrients will continue to come from breast milk or formula during this time.



## Common Benefits

- Introduces flavors and textures right away.
- May reduce likelihood of picky eating.
- Allows everyone to eat together because everyone is feeding themselves.
- Builds motor skills like picking up food, chewing, and swallowing.
- Encourages baby to pay attention to their own hunger and fullness signs.



## Common Concerns

**Low intake of calories.** Baby won't eat much at the start.



## Recommendations

Offer a variety of nutritious foods that are high in calories, such as avocado, full fat cheese, whole milk yogurt, or meats.

**Low iron intake.** Common first foods like fruits and vegetables are not a good source of iron.



Offer iron-rich foods every day, such as mashed beans, well-cooked egg, very tender ground meat, iron-fortified infant cereal and infant meats.

**Choking.** Baby could choke on larger pieces of food.



Research shows no greater risk of choking with baby-led weaning than with traditional baby foods. The key to prevent choking is proper adult supervision while the infant is eating and only serving appropriate foods (see information on the back).

Food safety is a common concern. Scan here for tips on how to store, thaw, cook, and chill foods safely.



**One additional tip:** Always serve baby's food from a separate plate or bowl than the storage container. This will prevent baby's saliva from mixing with any uneaten foods as that can cause them to go bad quicker.



## When to Offer Baby-Led Weaning Foods

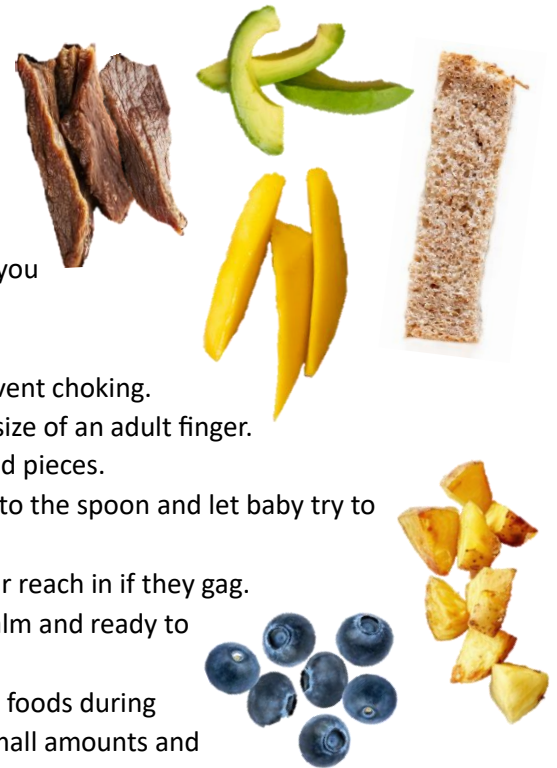
Babies show they are ready for solid foods, usually around 6 months of age, when they:

- Sit up without support.
- Control their head and neck well.
- Show interest in food.
- Pick up food and bring it to their mouth.
- Keep food in their mouth without pushing it back out.



## How to Offer Baby-Led Weaning Foods

- Remember to wash hands. Wash your hands before preparing baby's food and wash baby's hands before they eat.
- Offer foods that are soft and easily mashed between your fingers.
- Baby must **always** be seated upright when eating, never leaning back.
- **Never** leave baby alone with food. Baby may be feeding themselves, but you are still needed nearby.
- Begin with a few pieces of food at a time.
- Food shape is important to help baby grab, get into their mouth, and prevent choking.
  - For babies **6-8 months old**, cut food into stick-shapes, about the size of an adult finger.
  - For babies **9-11 months old**, foods may be cut into small bite-sized pieces.
- For soft foods served with a spoon, such as apple sauce, load the food onto the spoon and let baby try to feed themselves.
- Allow baby to eat at their own pace. Do not put food into baby's mouth or reach in if they gag.
- Consider offering some breast milk or formula before meals, so baby is calm and ready to explore new foods.
- Do not add salt or sugar to baby's food at the table. Adding seasonings to foods during cooking is a good way to introduce a world of flavor to baby. Start with small amounts and watch for any stomach upset.



## Foods to Offer - many of these are WIC eligible foods!

- **Fruits:** soft, ripe banana, pear, avocado, mango, applesauce
- **Vegetables:** peeled (if needed) and cooked sweet potato, carrot, squash, broccoli
- **Dairy:** yogurt, cottage cheese, shredded cheese
- **Grains:** whole wheat toast strip, pasta, rice
- **Protein:** scrambled egg, tofu, mashed beans, well-cooked to tender meat or fish (no bones)
- **Other:** infant food purees spread on toast strips or mixed into yogurt, cottage cheese, or scrambled egg

## Foods to Avoid



- Any food which cannot be easily mashed between fingers, such as raw, hard fruits and vegetables (apples, carrots)
- Round foods which haven't been cut (whole grapes, berries, cherry tomatoes)
- Foods cut into "coin" shapes (carrots, hot dogs)
- Nuts, seeds, popcorn, dried fruits
- Chunks of peanut butter/nut butter
- Cow's milk until 1 year of age
- Honey or foods made with honey until 1 year of age