

Weaning from the breast

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ABSTRACT

Exclusive breastfeeding provides optimal nutrition for infants until they are six months of age. After six months, infants require complementary foods to meet their nutritional needs. This is when weaning begins. Weaning is the gradual process of introducing complementary foods to an infant's diet while continuing to breastfeed.

There is no universally accepted or scientifically proven time when all breastfeeding must stop. The timing and process of weaning need to be individualized by mother and child. Weaning might be abrupt or gradual, take weeks or several months, be child-led or mother-led. Physicians need to guide and support mothers through the weaning process. This document replaces a previous Canadian Paediatric Society position statement on weaning published in 2004.

Key Words: *Breastfeeding; Breast milk; Complementary foods; Infant; Weaning*

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHYSICIANS

- Support exclusive breastfeeding, with vitamin D supplementation, for the first six months of life.
- Encourage continued breastfeeding for up to two years and beyond while providing appropriate nutritional guidance.
- Advise mothers to introduce iron-fortified foods in the form of meat, fish or iron-fortified cereals as first foods, to avoid iron deficiency.
- Advise slow, progressive, natural weaning whenever possible.
- Inform and support breastfeeding mothers while ensuring adequate nutrition for their babies, regardless of the timing of weaning.

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