

Baby Led Weaning

Provider Notes

“Baby Led Weaning” (BLW) is a term that has been around for decades and has many definitions. Most commonly it refers to the introduction of soft finger foods when an infant demonstrates their readiness to feed themselves. Its progression follows the baby’s individual pace rather than a set month-dependent change in food type or texture.

When Does BLW Start?

Generally, BLW occurs around 6 months. There is individual variability but the baby must be able to:

- sit up with little to no support
- grab things and hold items
- accurately guide items to their mouth

False cues that occur at earlier ages sometimes prompt caregivers to feed solids early. In BLW, parents are encouraged to recognize these as false cues as listed below.

False Cues:

- Watching others eat
- Waking at night
- Slow weight gain
- Lip smacking
- Not falling asleep while nursing or feeding

How is BLW Different?

- Generally, baby is self-feeding with their hands.
- No spoons or purees are used.
- Baby is served soft foods and he/she is in charge of how much and how quickly or slowly they eat.
- First foods are not necessarily grains.

How do you start BLW?

- Baby begins by joining the family for meals.
- In the beginning, this is more about exploring foods and less about the nutrition going into the baby.
- Use small pieces of soft foods to begin with.
- Let baby feed herself as much as possible.
- Let baby decide how much to eat and how quickly.
- Offer water with solids once baby is 6 months and older.

First Food Tips:

- **Vegetables should be cooked until soft** – carrots, broccoli (soft enough to eat, but not too soft, so that they crumble).

- **Roasted peeled vegetables** – potato wedges, sweet potato and carrots.
- **Ripe, soft fresh fruit** – pear, banana, mango, melon and avocado.
- **Meat and Fish** – avoid lumps, but make it easy enough for baby to pick up and chew. Typically, baby will suck on meat and spit out remainder until they are older and can chew better.
- **Beans** – rinse soft beans and mash them with a fork to get rid of larger lumps.

Why is BLW Considered Healthy?

- Baby led eating respects and fosters the baby’s awareness of their own hunger and satiety, which is associated with decreased obesity and better eating habits.
- Babies that have transitioned to solids with BLW have less preferences for sweet foods and a greater variety of foods they like by type and texture. This is associated with less picky eating in childhood, which is associated with better health outcomes. In addition, this may lead to greater diet variety and higher fruit and vegetable intakes later in life.
- BLW babies are more open to multiple tastings of foods.
- BLW is eating with all 5 senses, which offers excellent sensory and physical opportunities for babies.
- BLW takes the pressure off parents to get a specific volume of food into baby; therefore, parents often report enjoying it more.

What About Choking?

It is important to distinguish choking from gagging. These terms are commonly confused by parents.

- **Gagging** is a safety response.
- **Choking** is when the food is obstructing the baby’s airway and the baby is starting to look panicked, has stopped making sounds, and may be turning blue. Encourage parents to take infant CPR classes.

Note with BLW, it is important that babies are always sitting up and not leaning when they are eating.

What About Iron or Vitamin D?

Follow standard recommendations of care for these nutrients of concern.