



Baby-led weaning: Is it right for you and your child?

Baby-led weaning (BLW) has grown in popularity in recent years, but what is it? BLW can best be described as infant-led feedings with adult oversight. BLW can take many forms but often looks like the parent preparing solid foods to be baby-safe and letting the child feed themselves the prepared foods. For instance, maybe you take strawberries, hard-boiled eggs, and cooked sweet potatoes and place the food in front of your child. You would then let your child reach for the foods they wanted to eat, and you would act as a safety net for your child during their feedings. BLW places your child into an active role during the weaning process, allowing them to choose what and how much to eat. BLW differs from traditional spoon feedings. In traditional weaning, your child has less control over what or how much they eat. An active role during feedings can help your child develop their fine motor skills, understand their hunger, and increase the likelihood of enjoying different foods early in life.

A concern with BLW is that it increases the chances of a child choking. However, research shows this is not the case. Children fed in a BLW style do not have an increased risk of choking if foods are prepared correctly. This means avoiding sticky foods, crunchy foods, heavily processed items (premade and fast food), apples, round or coined-shaped foods (like grapes), undercooked animal products, and foods with a lot of salt. Instead, try foods that can be squashed quickly between two fingers and be cut into long strips for easier pickup. One of the best ways to keep your child safe while weaning is to know when they are ready to start the weaning process. Classic signs to look for include performing a pincer grasp with their hand and if they can keep their head and body straight without help. This is important for being able to hold food in their mouth and swallow. All children progress at different speeds. So, it is essential to consider where your child is in their development before starting BLW.

While BLW might seem like a lot more work for the adult, it typically is not. Since the child leads BLW, they control what they eat and how much they eat. This simple change can help a child learn to embrace their body's natural hunger and fullness. As they grow older, they have a better understanding of when they should start and stop eating. It also helps them widen their tastes by showing them new flavors separately instead of a pureed mix. You don't have to buy special purees or baby food. Instead, you take your food and make it safe for your child to eat. BLW can cut food costs and build a better family relationship because everyone eats the same thing!

Is baby-led weaning right for you and your child? When answering this question, it is important to think of a couple of things. First, look for the signs that your child is developmentally ready to

start weaning, such as the pincer grasp and controlled head and neck posture. Second, be ready with safe baby foods like bananas, avocados, cooked ground meat, boiled beans, and oatmeal (to name a few). Make sure you have the time to prepare those foods to be a safe size, shape, and consistency for your child. If you can't or don't want to do BLW, that's OK. Traditional weaning works well for some people and provides children with plenty of energy and good nutrients to grow.

Reference

United States Department of Agriculture. (2019, April 26). People at risk: Children under 5. FoodSafety.Gov. Retrieved October 21, 2021 <https://www.foodsafety.gov/people-at-risk/children-under-five>

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