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Stuck on the Boob? What You Need to Know About Toddler Weaning

FEB 24, 2022



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“Boobie!” she yells, clawing at my chest with tremendous force — and I can’t blame her.

With its high levels of antibodies and nutritional content, breast milk really is **liquid magic**.

I, like countless mums out there, continued to breastfeed my toddler for many reasons. But at times, such as in the supermarket or in the middle of a funeral, I found myself becoming resentful I stuck it out for so long.

But how to wean my little milk-addict off the ever-attractive nipple?

What the experts say about weaning

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends mothers breastfeed exclusively for the first 6 months (if possible) and continue until their child turns two. Naturally, breastfeeding is not an option for every mother, and we applaud you for all your efforts.

Some popular weaning strategies include:

- Letting your child lead by omitting the feed they are least interested in
- Replacing feeds with food, a cup or a bottle (depending on their age)
- Offering a dummy for extra sucking if needed

NSW Australian Breastfeeding Association assistant branch president Nicole Bridges says breastfeeding benefits the mother's health as much as the child's and **recommends gradual weaning**. "This is best for the mother's breasts and is also less traumatic for the child," she says.

Ms. Bridges recommends:

- Setting boundaries about when and where the feeds take place
- Giving your child an incentive, such as a celebration or "weaning party"
- Resisting the urge to express too much milk if your breasts become engorged, so as not to increase your supply.

Rudolf Steiner playgroup leader Meron Lovegrove sees many exhausted mothers who still breastfeed their 3-year-olds through the night, advising them to only keep the first and last feeds of the day, as all other feeds are merely habit.

Now, there is nothing wrong with this at all, but if you are starting to resent breastfeeding your toddler or are ready for this journey to end, here are some techniques to try:

Instant weaning

Some mothers adopt this method by leaving the child with another responsible caregiver for a few nights to help the child adapt. This may dramatically cut down the time spent to achieve weaning, but the long-term negatives include breast infection and a decrease in hormone levels, resulting in mood swings or depression.

Should these problems arise, the ABA recommends seeking help from a breastfeeding counsellor or lactation consultant, who can provide support and tailor a plan to suit your family.

Gradual weaning

In the case of feeding on demand, gradual weaning may look something like this:

- 6-12 months — wean off night feeds
- 12-15 months — continue with three daytime feeds
- 15-18 months — reduce to one early morning and one early evening feed
- 18-21 months — offer one "dream feed" before bed
- 21-24 months or beyond — wean completely



Weaning collaboratively

Weaning collaboratively is another option and allows a child to take control of when and how the breastfeeding journey comes to an end. It falls under the Attachment Parenting methodology – the philosophy based on the concept of allowing a child to separate from the parent at his/her own pace.

The principles go back to the tribal instincts discussed in the international bestseller by Jean Liedloff, *The Continuum Concept*.

Advocate and mother-of-one Angela of Naremburn NSW weaned her daughter Amelie three months shy of her fourth birthday. “She was quite dependent on the breast for comfort because we had always used it to soothe and distract her as a newborn,” she says. “I listened to her needs about wanting the breast but if I felt what she really needed was connection or to cry or have a snack, I’d offer her that instead.”

Self-weaning

Some mothers are lucky to never have to choose how to wean their child, as their child suddenly decides to forego the boob him/herself. This has a lot to do with the child’s temperament, recommencement of the mother’s menstrual cycle or a subsequent pregnancy (which can change the taste of the milk) or because more emphasis has been put on solid food.

The Natural Child states that children who are started on solids before 4-6 months may soon come to depend on these foods for most of their nourishment. It is common for breastfed children who consume a variety of solid foods to lose interest in breastfeeding from 6-12 months.

What your peers say

There is absolutely nothing wrong with **breastfeeding a toddler**, in public, at home, wherever. But society has placed a negative spin on this act and thus, many mums do feel uncomfortable then their toddler starts to tug at their shirt and ask for a feed.

It is better to feed only at home than to wean early because of peer or societal pressure but surrounding yourself with those who hold similar beliefs to you will ensure you feel supported on your weaning journey. If you don’t have support, join your local ABA group, which holds group meetings every fortnight.

Reclaiming your body

Weaning a child can open a bag of mixed emotions. You may feel like you **finally have your body back**, suddenly have more energy to give to your other children and even a newfound desire to be intimate with your partner.

On the flipside, it is common to feel sad at the loss of the physical bond you shared with your child.

Talk to your child about this change, emphasising they are becoming a little boy/girl and what that means more time at the park, an occasional treat and other things not given to “babies”. You might buy your child a special cuddle toy or if you are feeling creative, invent a song or story around the theme of weaning to help normalise it.

While remaining strong in your decision, spend extra time before bed reading, singing and holding your child if they are feeling fragile or while they cry.

And if you need to have a cry too, go ahead. You will find that with time you will feel renewed and realise that the bond created with your baby at their birth can never be broken, regardless of whether you are breastfeeding or not.

What to read next

- [Mum Truth: This is What Breastfeeding a Toddler Looks Like](#)
- [6 Unexpected Things I Learnt Breastfeeding My Toddler](#)
- [Congratulations, You've Retired! An Open Letter to my Boobs After a Decade of Feeding](#)

Story submitted by Zanna Taeni from [Words By Indigo](#).

