



Etelä-Pohjanmaan
sairaanhoitopiiri



Seinäjoki Central Hospital



Tips for baby-led weaning

Hanneksenrinne 7
60220 Seinäjoki
7650-2021-P

Telephone (switchboard):
06 415 4111

E-mail:
firstname.lastname@epshp.fi



What is baby-led weaning?

Baby-led weaning means allowing babies to eat by themselves. Instead of being fed purees with a spoon, the child is offered the types of foods that they can grab with their own hands and bring to their mouth. As the baby's motor and other skills increase, they can also eat their food with a spoon or fork – unassisted.

What are the benefits of baby-led weaning?

Baby-led weaning allows babies to explore food at their own pace and using all their senses. Baby-led weaning helps children become familiar with new foods, develops their motor skills, lays the foundations for their speech development and supports their natural regulation of hunger and satiety.

In baby-led weaning, the child can personally decide which and how much of the offered foods to eat and at what pace. This also lets other people concentrate on their own meals.

Baby-led weaning can also facilitate food preparation. You do not necessarily have to make separate purees for the child; instead, the child can eat many of the same foods as the rest of the family from the start.

When can baby-led weaning be started?

Baby-led weaning can be started when the child is able to sit up lightly supported, control the movements of their head and bring food to their mouth unassisted. These skills usually develop around the age of 5–7 months. However, every child is an individual who develops at their own pace. When the child is six months old, they need solid foods in addition to breast milk or formula.

How do you start baby-led weaning?

Baby-led weaning is practised after the baby has been fed with breast milk or formula. When the child is eating, make sure that they are sitting upright in a high chair, preferably with their feet supported on the footrest.

You can protect the table with a placemat and the floor with oilcloth or newspapers. The child can eat without clothes on or while wearing a sleeved bib to make it easier to clean up afterwards.



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Baby-led weaning is started by giving the baby one or two different types of food at a time. You can start practising once or twice a day, during family meals. Initially, the food should be cooked until it is so soft that an adult is able to mash it between their tongue and palate. The pieces must be large enough for the baby to be able to grab a hold of them without the food disappearing inside the baby's small fist. As the child ages and gains skills, the size of the pieces can be reduced.

During baby-led weaning, an adult must not put anything inside the child's mouth. The child must also not be left to eat without adult supervision. When the child has finished eating finger foods, you should make sure that no food is left inside their mouth.

Table 1. Examples of foods that you can start with.

Food	Preparation
Chopped root and other vegetables - carrot, potato, sweet potato, cauliflower, broccoli, parsnip, courgette	Steamed, boiled or cooked in the oven until soft
Avocado	In thick slices
Tender meat and game - chicken, turkey, pork, beef, mutton - venison, reindeer	Carefully cooked, in thin strips or as minced meat or meatballs
Fish	Cooked until soft, with the fish bones removed.
Fruit and Finnish berries	Fresh (soft fruit and berries) or lightly steamed
Soft bread	Home-baked without salt, in pieces of a suitable size
Thick porridges	Without salt
Corn snacks	As is
Porridge rice	Cooked until soft, the rice can be rolled into 'balls'
Soft, unsalted tofu	As is, chopped
Eggs	Carefully cooked, scrambled



Is baby-led weaning safe?

When implemented correctly, baby-led weaning is as safe as eating purees. The eating situation is safe when the child eats the finger food while sitting upright and puts the food inside their mouth by themselves, the food is sufficiently soft, and the child is under constant supervision.

Foods that pose a risk of choking must be avoided. Examples of such foods include

- hard vegetables and fruit, particularly when cut into the shape of a coin
- whole grapes, cherry tomatoes and fruit containing a stone
- segments of citrus fruit with their membranes
- tough meat and fish with fish bones
- whole nuts and popcorn.

It is common for a child practising eating finger foods to gag. The gag reflex of a small child is very sensitive, and gagging will decrease once the child learns to move the food around in their mouth.

When the child gags, an adult must not put their fingers inside the child's mouth, as this could push the food deeper down the child's throat. The child will usually spit out the pieces they are unable to eat.

The parents of every baby should familiarise themselves with first aid instructions, regardless of the way the child eats their meals.

Text content:
Soili Alanne, PhD, registered dietitian
Riikka Suorajärvi-Bron, M.H.Sc., registered dietitian
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