

Connecticut WIC Program:

Consistent Breastfeeding Education Messages: Weaning is a Part of Breastfeeding

Why is this important?

Weaning is part of breastfeeding, every mother/infant dyad will eventually wean. For many reasons, moms may be hesitant to bring up this subject with WIC staff. Although we would love to see our breastfeeding moms continue to breastfeed for at least 6 months or longer, it is important to respect a mom's decision to wean when she and her baby are ready. Openly and regularly discussing weaning as part of breastfeeding, both prenatally and postpartum, will reassure mom that when she is ready to wean, WIC staff is available support her.

WIC's Goal: Help moms feel good physically, mentally and emotionally with their decision to wean and assist them through this stage of breastfeeding.

Learning Objectives: After participating in a group session or individual counseling the participant will:

1. Feel good about her decision to wean and know she will be supported along the way.
2. Decide if she truly wants to wean or if she has just encountered a stumbling block in her breastfeeding journey and that there are options to help her continue if that is her preference.
3. Be able to wean with knowledge of ways to avoid physical discomfort and medical complications.

Provide Affirmation: Your breast milk has given your baby a great start in life! (A mom may feel like she has failed, so focus on her breastfeeding accomplishments.)

Key educational messages: Supporting her decision and making the transition comfortable physically, mentally and emotionally.

❖ Anticipatory Guidance

- Weaning begins with the introduction of breastmilk substitutes or solid foods, even if there is no intention to discontinue breastfeeding. It is the beginning of the weaning process.
- Weaning may be initiated by mom or infant, or may be a mutual decision.
- Mom may feel pressured to maintain goals or deadlines she set for weaning when she was pregnant or when her baby was a newborn. Reassure her that breastfeeding is a process and her goals may change. What is important is that she has the resources and support to meet her goals, whatever they are.
- Don't assume mom and infant are planning to stop breastfeeding just because they are approaching the child's first birthday. Many families continue breastfeeding into toddlerhood and beyond.

❖ Assess if weaning is her goal:

- Although she may feel pressure to continue breastfeeding from others, she is the one to ultimately decide when to wean her baby. Keep her breastfeeding goals in mind.

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- Ask open ended questions to be sure weaning is her goal. Sometimes moms think they need to wean in situations such as returning to work, taking prescribed medication, or a perceived low milk supply.
 - Offer her options to continue breastfeeding when she approaches such road blocks to breastfeeding.
 - Empower her to make an informed decision about what she feels is best for her and her baby!
- ❖ **Give her the support she needs when weaning is her goal:**
- Some women feel like they have failed as a mom if they want to wean, so reassure her that she has given her baby a great start in life.
 - Remind her that it is her baby and her body and she is the only one who can make the decision to wean. Always remember to make her feel good about her decision to breastfeed and to wean. Respect that she is a capable mother and assist her in making informed decisions about how to feed her baby. Encourage her to resist comparing her situation with that of other families, focusing on her and her baby's needs instead.
 - Explore ways that she can feel comfortable while she is weaning. Gradual weaning will help prevent discomfort and risk of medical complications (engorgement, plugged ducts, mastitis). Eliminating one nursing session at a time over a series of weeks, leaving nighttime and early morning sessions until later in the process, can help with the transition. In the meantime ice packs can help ease any discomfort she does experience, and assure her that discomfort will only be temporary.

Websites:

NYS WIC Program www.breastfeedingpartners.org

Texas WIC Program <https://www.breastmilkcounts.com/>

Handouts:

How Do I Wean My Baby? <https://www.llli.org/breastfeeding-info/weaning-how-to/>

Weaning and Mothers' Feelings <https://www.laleche.org.uk/after-weaning-what-next/>

Resources:

La Leche League International www.llli.org

Books:

Bengson, Diane. *How Weaning Happens*. Schaumburg, IL: La Leche League International, 1999. Print.
The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding New Eighth Edition. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Apr. 2013.