

When you have a fully established milk supply, weaning causes certain physical and emotional changes. It's important to understand these changes and know how to manage them so that you don't end up with mastitis or become overwhelmed with feelings of sadness.

During the weaning process, as the breasts slowly decrease their output, you may find that you become engorged, see an increase in plugged ducts, or possibly develop mastitis. You will also experience a drop in your prolactin levels which can lead to feelings of sadness or depression. After weaning your breasts may continue to make milk for a while, sometimes even up to a year (drops usually). This is normal and nothing to be worried about. Follow the tips below to minimize any discomfort and avoid problems while weaning:

- **Wear a supportive sports bra.** Binding your breasts is no longer recommended as it can lead to plugged ducts or mastitis. Wear nursing pads to absorb any leaking.
- **Do NOT restrict fluids.** It doesn't help! Drink to thirst.
- **Cut down on salt intake.** Salt causes you to retain fluids.
- **Supplement with Vitamin B6.** Take 200mg each day for 5 days to relieve engorgement.
- **Drink sage tea.** Sage tea contains estrogen and works well to decrease supply. Mix 1 tsp of rubbed sage into 1 cup of hot water. Let it steep for 15 min. Mix with honey or milk. Drink one cup every 6 hours. Peppermint (Altoids) or parsley can be helpful as well.
- **Use cabbage leaf compresses.** Cabbage leaf works well to reduce engorgement and dry up milk supply. Buy plain cabbage (green or purple), rinse the leaves, and store in the refrigerator. Take a leaf and place it in your bra, wrapping it around the breast and up into your armpit area. Change every 30 minutes or when they begin to wilt.
- **Relieve discomfort by expressing some milk.** Using hand expression or your pump, express just enough milk to soften your breasts. Do NOT empty them completely.
- **No stimulation of the breasts or nipples.** Be careful of clothing rubbing the nipples and/or sexual play that involves the nipples as the stimulation can be enough to keep your breasts making milk. Once you are fully weaned you can resume your activities.
- **Observe your breasts for lumps, 'hot spots', soreness.** Massage your breasts during feedings or pumping until they disappear. If you develop a fever, see your physician.
- **Speak with a counselor, physician, clergy member or lactation consultant if you are overwhelmed with feelings of depression or thoughts of hurting yourself.** While some sadness is normal when you wean, due to the loss of the close relationship and change in hormones, overwhelming sadness or feelings of depression are not normal. Weaning later in the breastfeeding year or beyond can bring on postpartum depression due to the drop in hormones.

# Information for breastfeeding military mothers



## **WEANING**

Whether you plan to breastfeed for 6 weeks or 6 months or longer, there comes a time when you need to wean. While the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends 6 months of exclusive breastfeeding, with the addition of solids foods combined with breastfeeding for 12 months or longer, you may need to wean earlier due to workplace issues, deployment or personal preference. If you make it past a year, you will need to wean from pumping. No matter the reason, weaning can be easy or difficult, you and your baby have enjoyed a warm, loving relationship and it can be difficult to move on to the next stage. Take your time and think it through, then follow these tips below.

### **Mother-led Weaning**

Mother-led weaning means YOU decide when to wean, it can be gradual or accelerated.

#### **~ Accelerated**

Drop one feeding or pumping session every 2-3 days and replace with formula or solid foods depending on the age of your baby. This is a rapid way to wean and reduce your supply quickly. Watch for engorgement and plugged ducts. See the tips on the backside for more info.

#### **~ Gradual**

Drop one breastfeeding or pumping session every 7-10 days and replace with formula or solid foods depending on the age of your baby. This is a easy way to transition your baby to other feeding methods and reduce your supply slowly.

### **Baby-led Weaning**

Baby-led weaning means you let YOUR baby decide when he or she is done. This may happen around 9 months when baby is more active and loses interest, or it might happen when he or she is a toddler. Follow your baby's lead and practice "Don't Offer, Don't Refuse" by not offering to breastfeed, but do breastfeed when baby asks. Give solid foods at regular feeding times.

### **Weaning from the Pump**

After a year there is no reason to keep pumping. Enjoy the closeness of breastfeeding without the hassle of pumping at work. If you are having trouble weaning from the pump, try these strategies:

#### **~Increase the time between sessions**

Gradually extend your pumping sessions from 3 hours to 4 hours to 6 hours to 8 hours. As you extend your time between sessions you'll note that sessions 'fall-off' the schedule during your work day. Example: If you normally pump at 0900, 1200 and 1500, extend from 0900 to 1300, then 1400 and then drop the 1500 session. Then extend the time between 0900 and later sessions gradually to 1500 and drop the 1500 session again. Finally drop the 0900 session.

#### **~ Decrease the time/amount pumped**

In addition you might want to decrease the amount or time you pump during a session. Gradually go from pumping for 20 min to 15 min to 10min to 5 min. Alternatively decrease from pumping 6 ounces to 4 ounces to 2 ounces to just enough to feel comfortable.

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