

Baby-led Weaning
a developmental approach to
introducing solids

Gill Rapley, MSc

What is 'weaning'?

- ◆ Introducing solids?
- ◆ Stopping breastfeeding?
- ◆ Both these things?

Who does the feeding?

Self-feeding
begins at birth



Breastfeeding relies on:

- ◆ Stimulation of prolactin
- ◆ Effective attachment
- ◆ Removal of milk
- ◆ **The baby**



The self-feeding continuum



Markers of readiness?

- ◆ The book says so
- ◆ Weight gain slows
- ◆ Baby appears hungry
 - ◆ waking at night
 - ◆ watching parents eating
- ◆ Custom and practice

Developmental readiness

Naylor and Morrow, 2001, looked at:

- ◆ Immunological development
- ◆ Gastrointestinal development
- ◆ Oral motor development

*and noted a 'convergence of maturation'
at around ... 6 months*

Markers of readiness?

- ◆ The book has changed!
- ◆ Weight gain slowing is normal
- ◆ Baby is maturing and keen to explore
 - (waking at night)
 - (watching parents eating)
- ◆ Custom and practice need to change

A 4-month-old baby:

- ◆ Is an efficient breastfeeder
- ◆ Is interested in the world around her
- ◆ May be keen to touch food but cannot grasp accurately

Conclusions?

1. Babies of four months cannot feed themselves with solid foods.
2. If they are to have them, they need them to be pureed and fed by spoon.

A 6-month-old baby:

- ◆ Is beginning to sit alone
- ◆ Is able to reach and grasp accurately
- ◆ Takes everything to his mouth

Conclusions?

1. Babies of six months can feed themselves with solid foods.
2. They therefore do not require soft, pureed foods – or spoon feeding.

Developmental readiness

- ◆ Immunological development
- ◆ Digestive ability
- ◆ Oral motor skills

= 6 months

- ◆ Gross motor skills
- ◆ Fine motor skills
- ◆ Hand-eye co-ordination

= 6 months

The baby's motivation to feed himself with solid foods

- ◆ Curiosity
- ◆ The desire to mimic
- ◆ The desire to explore
- ◆ The desire to be independent
- ◆ NOT hunger!

But what about ...

... the 'window of opportunity'?



The critical period in infant feeding

Illingworth and Lister, 1964

- ◆ Babies should be given solid foods shortly **after** they have begun to chew
- ◆ The average age at which a child begins to chew is **6 months**
- ◆ Babies begin to chew shortly **after** they have begun to reach out for objects and get them

I wonder when she'll ...

- ◆ ... smile?
- ◆ ... sit up?
- ◆ ... crawl?
- ◆ ... walk?
- ◆ ... say her first word?
- ◆ ... start solid foods?



Common concerns

- ◆ Risk of choking?
- ◆ Balanced diet?
- ◆ Enough to eat?
- ◆ OK for bottle-fed babies?
- ◆ The mess!
- ◆ Playing vs. cutlery and table manners

Development of self-feeding skills

Rooting, attaching, suckling



Reaching, grabbing, mouthing



Biting, chewing



Purposeful swallowing

Implementing a self-feeding approach

- ◆ Aim for shared mealtimes
- ◆ Sit the baby up
- ◆ Offer fist-sized pieces
- ◆ Allow play/exploration
- ◆ Carry on breastfeeding on demand
- ◆ Let the baby stay in control

Benefits for the family

- ◆ No need for pureeing
- ◆ Cheaper
- ◆ No concerns about what to give baby
- ◆ The family can eat together - anywhere
- ◆ The whole process is simpler



Potential bonuses

- ◆ More breastfeeding – for longer?
- ◆ Better overall nutrition?
- ◆ Less obesity?
- ◆ Fewer eating disorders?
- ◆ Improved co-ordination?

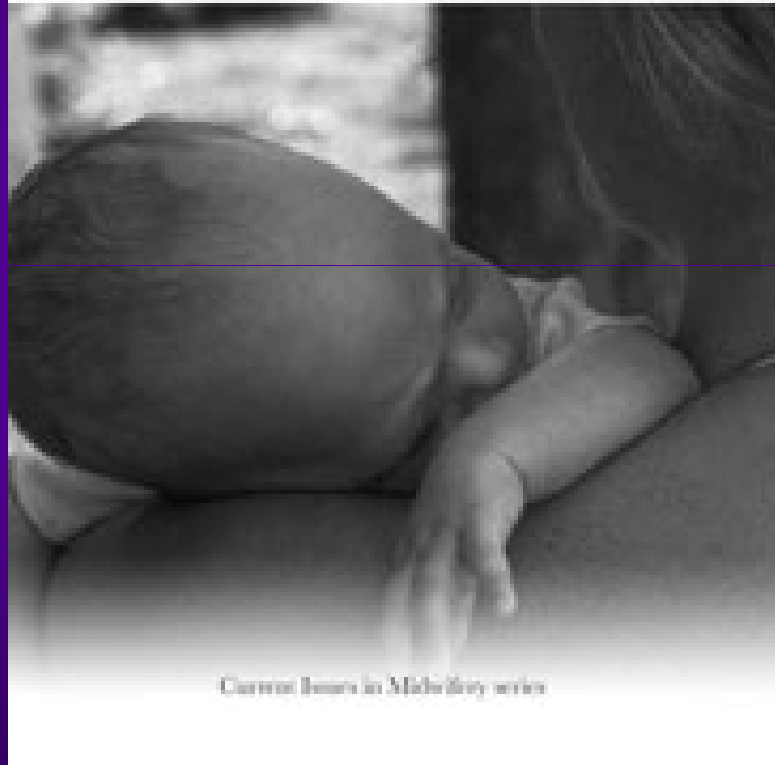


Why 'baby-led' weaning?

- ◆ It makes *developmental* sense
- ◆ Parents have been doing it for years
- ◆ It's more fun
- ◆ It may have important health implications

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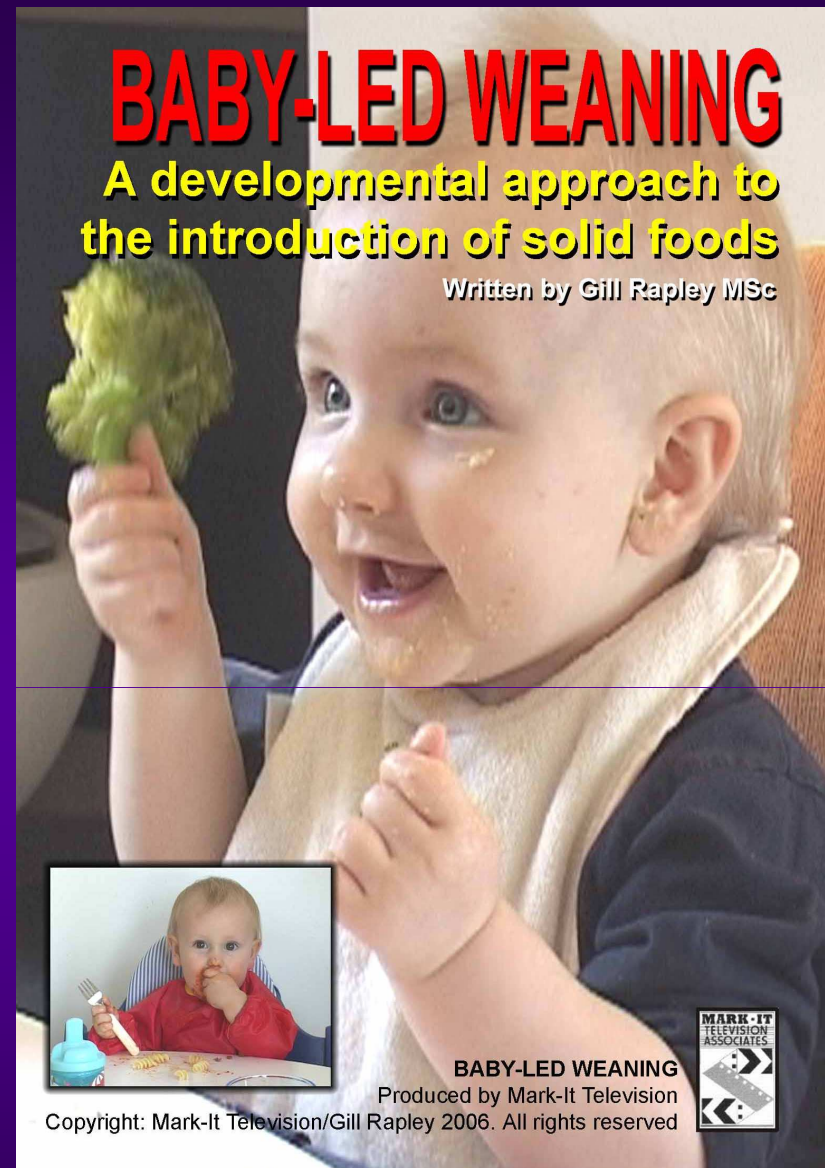
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Written by Gill Rapley MSc



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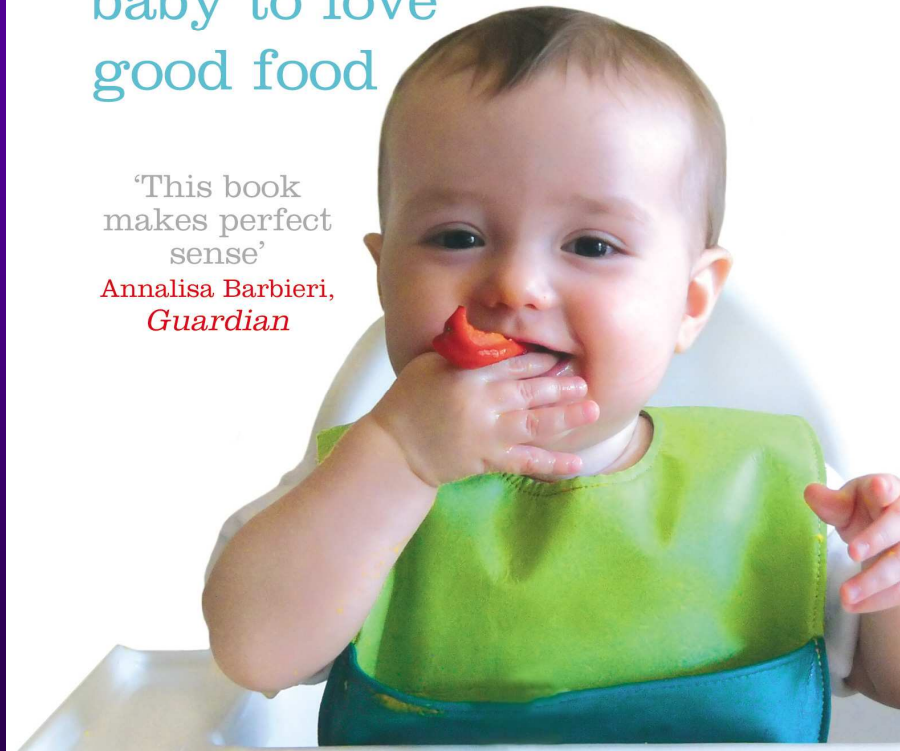
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Baby-led Weaning

Helping your
baby to love
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'This book
makes perfect
sense'

*Annalisa Barbieri,
Guardian*



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