INTRODUCING SOLIDS
Baby-led weaning
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Readiness for solids - how do we know?

- The book says so
- Weight gain slows
- Baby appears hungry
  - waking at night?
  - watching parents eating?
- Everyone else is doing it
Naylor and Morrow, 2001 reviewed the relevant literature concerning babies’:

- Immunological development
- Gastrointestinal development
- Oral motor development
Here’s another fine mess . . .

What about …

- reliable signs of readiness?
- getting started?
- the ‘window of opportunity’?
The critical period for learning

Illingworth and Lister, 1964

- The introduction of a specific stimulus at an appropriate time permits a milestone of development to occur.
- The critical or sensitive period (for the development of any skill) is intimately related to maturation.
- Restriction of practice inhibits skill development.
The critical period in infant feeding

- 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.
Getting started

- Babies of six months can chew
- Babies who can chew don’t need sloppy food
- Lack of opportunity to practise chewing may hinder development of this skill
The self-feeding continuum

Self-feeding begins at birth
Self-feeding continuum and the ‘introduction’ of solids

- Birth
- 6-12 months
- 3 years old
- Self-feeding
- Self-feeding
Signs of readiness

- 26 weeks?
- Developmental clues:
  - Beginning to sit alone
  - Able to reach and grab
  - Taking everything to his mouth
  - Making consonant sounds
Let the baby lead the way

(Or: Never mind the window . . . what about the opportunity?)
What we observed

- At 4 months, the babies weren’t ready to feed themselves
- At around 6 months, they:
  - were able to get food into their mouths
  - were beginning to eat purposefully
  - liked to explore their food
  - didn’t seem to need teeth
And by 9 months . . .

The babies:

- were effective self-feeders
- appeared more dextrous than their peers
- enjoyed mealtimes – no food refusal
- liked to choose what to eat, and in what order
- tended to dislike being spoon-fed
- were beginning to manage spoons on their own
What the mothers said

- They all think I’m a bit weird!
- She really seems to enjoy eating.
- I didn’t expect him to be eating raisins.
- Everyone’s really jealous now!
- I’ll definitely do this with my next baby.
Things to consider

- It can be messy!
- What about choking?
- Can bottle-fed babies do this?
- Ensuring adequate nutrition
- Parents need to adopt the whole approach
Implementing a self-feeding approach

- Aim for shared mealtimes
- Sit the baby up
- Offer fist-sized pieces
- Allow play/exploration
- Continue to breastfeed on demand
- Let the baby stay in control
It’s so much better!

- No need for pureed foods
- The whole process is simpler
- Babies enjoy a wider range of foods
- Babies’ skill development is enhanced
- All the family can eat together
Is there another way?

Introduce the baby to the solids not the solids (in)to the baby!