

Weaning, in some instances, can be a challenge. When is the right time to begin? What if one child is ready and the other(s) is not? As the parent, how can I make this as painless as possible and not feel guilty? What if nursing them settles them down and is the only way they will fall asleep?

1. When to begin weaning:

Decide when you think the time is right to begin weaning. You know your own situation best: the children could be 2 months, 10 months, 1 year, 2 years or anywhere in between. It may be because you need to go back to work, or because you are exhausted with nursing combined with everything else. There may be pressure from others to wean, and you may need a plan to handle that pressure.

Signs that your multiples may be ready to wean:

- the children themselves may be starting to wean, but not completely, and you would like to speed up the completion date;
- the children are becoming disinterested and are self-weaning (it does happen from time to time);
- one child is ready to wean and the other isn't.

If one child is ready to wean, they may continue to nurse only because their sibling hasn't stopped yet. Multiples can become quite competitive if they feel their sibling(s) is getting something they are not. However sometimes the opposite happens, and one stops nursing and isn't bothered that their sibling(s) continues to nurse. Knowing that one is ready to wean may be the impetus to think about weaning both or all of the children.

- do not plan any huge changes in nursing patterns at emotionally stressful times: holidays, travel, having family guests, starting daycare, illness;
- if you are receiving pressure from others indicating "it's time," gently stand your ground as to what you and your multiples need.

2. The weaning process:

Whatever the reason, consider introducing weaning slowly. Thus, not only do the kids have a chance to learn the new routine, but your body can also make the necessary physical adjustments. Just as demand increases milk supply, a reduced demand will result in less milk production, with the supply tapering off as the time between nursings increases. Continue using nursing pads in your bra, in case of any leaking. Weaning should not be a painful process, but you might expect to be engorged at some intervals and need to express the milk (nurse a baby or hand express). Slow reduction also allows for a gradual change in the physical relationship of Mom to babies and vice versa.

Younger babies

- it may be that weaning, for whatever reason, needs to occur when the babies are young. In such cases, switching to formula needs to occur slowly, so that not only can your body adjust to the reduced demand to produce milk, but the babies can also adjust to the formula;
- there may be a reason for one or more babies to continue nursing and one to be weaned. In one case,



one baby was a projectile vomiter, and in order to be sure he was getting enough milk and to be burped regularly, Mom was encouraged that he be switched to formula while she continued to nurse her other twin;

- if switching to bottles and formula, remember it is important that babies be held as often as possible for feedings. Propping bottles from time to time may be necessary, but not on an ongoing basis as babies benefit from physical contact;
- if you need to wean your babies because you are on medication, don't stop "cold turkey". Pumping from time to time will comfortably help reduce your supply.

Older children

- changing the routine is a good place to begin. Drop the easiest daytime sessions first, or stretch out the time between daytime nursing with a distraction (story, trip to the park). You may still need to nurse at nap times;
- try a sippy cup or straw if someone is thirsty;
- a good rule of thumb: "don't offer, don't refuse";
- have a nursing song, perhaps ABC's or slowly count to 20, to indicate the length of a nursing session. Be consistent so they know what to expect;
- avoid areas of the house where they were nursed, e.g. sitting/lying on the sofa, their room, recliner chair;
- some children respond well to verbal interactions/preparations, e.g. "big girls and boys use a cup";
- you may only nurse them at nap/bedtime for a time;
- when working on giving up the night time nursing, some Moms leave the house so that Dad, partner or grandparent can be the one to put the kiddies to bed. If Mom is anywhere in the house, expect to be found and there may be a request to nurse. Staying out of the house ensures that someone else is the soother and comforter for the time being;
- for older toddlers/children, consider having a Weaning or Milestone Party to celebrate their growing up;
- consider rite of passage changes to their bedrooms, changing cribs to "big kid" beds, moving out the rocking chair, and so on;
- one inventive Mom put bandages on her nipples signifying that she had a "bobo".

3. Things to think about:

- babies and toddlers nurse also for comfort, so as weaning occurs they are also increasing their other sources of comfort. This can take a little time to become the norm. Lots of hugs and physical touch are helpful.



- never compare the children to one another, e.g. "Look at Harry, he's a big boy and doesn't need to nurse";
- be flexible, especially at the beginning. If one (two or three) is having difficulty letting go, be aware of each child's individual needs and concerns. Being in-tune to those needs and concerns will, in the long run, pay dividends;
- stick with what works for a period of time until each child is comfortable with the change in routine, e.g. stretching time between day time nursings, no nursing during the day;
- be prepared for setbacks. Tomorrow is another day and you can all try again;
- don't rush the process. Let the children tell you as much as possible what they need and when;
- if at any time you are having difficulty, consult a Lactation Consultation, Doula, Midwife or contact your local La Leche League chapter; and
- speak to parents with older multiples and find out what worked for them.

Sources:

Mothering Multiples: Breastfeeding & Caring for Twins or More, Karen Kerkhoff Gromada, La Leche League Int'l, Revised Edition, 2007

La Leche League of Canada

www.lalecheleague.org

Additional Resources:

These 2 books are not multiple-birth focused but they do contain relevant information on weaning. They are available on-line through La Leche League:

How Weaning Happens, Diane Bengson and *Nursing Mother's Guide to Weaning*, Kathleen Huggins and Linda Ziedrich

Documents and Articles

Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheets on various topics

Compiled by Lynda P. Haddon, Multiple Birth Educator, www.multiplebirthsfamilies.com with Erin Shaheen, and Kathy Litalien

Recommended Sources of Information:

La Leche League of Canada Referral Service

www.lalecheleague.org

Lactation Consulting Services Canada

www.breastfeedinghelp.ca

MBC Breastfeeding Peer Support Network

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