

# HOW TO COMBINE BABY LED WEANING AND PUREES



BEGINNER GUIDE TO STARTING SOLIDS

Natalia Stasenko MS, RD

Thank you so much for downloading my beginner guide on starting solids using the mixed approach - both finger foods and purees. I hope it will answer some of your questions and give you a solid start to exploring the wonderful world of food with your little one.

But first, let's see if your little one is ready...

### Is Your Baby Ready for Solids?

Here are the signs that your baby is ready for solids (typically at around 6 months of age):

- Can sit up with some support. Most babies are able to sit unsupported by 6-7 months but a little wobbliness is not a problem if you can fix it easily with rolled up kitchen towels placed on both sides of the high chair.
- Has neck/head control and can hold them still. This is extremely important for preventing choking.
- Her thrust instinct has diminished and she does not push the food out of her mouth with the tongue.
- If you try to feed her puree, she can close her lips over the spoon and can keep the puree in her mouth.

OR

- If you give her a long, graspable piece of finger food, she tries to grab it with her hand and bring it to her mouth.

## PUREES OR FINGER FOODS?

If you had a baby about 10 years ago or earlier, it would have probably never occurred to you to offer her finger foods when you are just starting solids. The mainstream strategy was to begin with thin smooth purees at around 4 months, then gradually upgrade the texture by transitioning to thicker and lumpier foods before introducing bite sized finger foods at around 9-10 months.

More recent research suggests that solids are best started closer to 6 months with a focus on a variety of textures which is very important for the development of oral motor skills and a varied diet in the future.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, British Dietetic Association and Canadian Pediatric Society are responding to this evidence by encouraging parents to be more adventurous with a variety of textures including purees, lumpy foods and finger foods from early on.

Examples of various textures : smooth baby cereal, a banana smashed with a fork and a piece of ripe mango.

### **What I love about purees**

Purees are an easy and familiar way to start solids with your baby.

They are also a great way to incorporate important nutrients into your baby's diet.

Spoon feeding purees can be a fun and stress free way to start solids, but only if parents are not afraid to challenge their baby with more difficult textures as soon as she is ready.

## What worries me about purees

It is very easy to get “pushy” with a spoon and start controlling the amount of food the baby eats.

I also saw many parents being encouraged by how well their baby eats purees to give him more…purees.

Getting “stuck” in the smooth puree stage may bring around feeding problems in the future.

## Baby Led Weaning (BLW)

BLW or Baby Led Weaning is different from the traditional approach to starting solids. The term was coined by Ms. Gill Rapley, co-author of “Baby-led Weaning: The Essential Guide to Introducing Solid Foods.” The Baby Led Weaning movement originated in the UK and it promotes skipping purees altogether and instead letting a baby to self feed long graspable or large coin shaped finger foods.

Some popular BLW choices include avocado wedges, chicken drumsticks, slices of roasted sweet potato and steamed broccoli with a stalk.

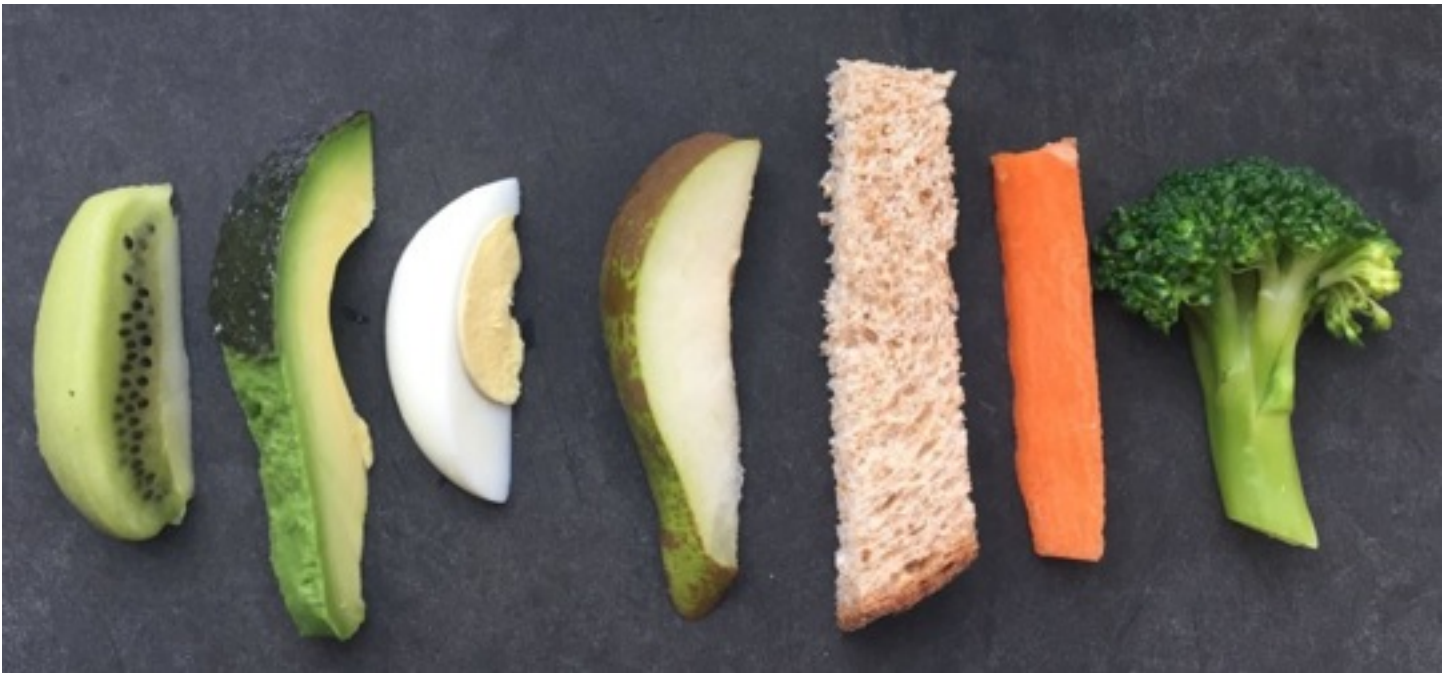
Babies join the family at meals and eat whatever the rest of the family is eating, providing the food can be held in a fist and brought to the mouth.

The basic premise of Baby Lead Weaning is that if you wait to start solids at 6 months, babies will be ready to eat finger foods and the puree stage can be skipped altogether so that the babies learn to eat what the parents are eating.

When it comes to spoon feeding, opinions seem to be divided in the BLW camp. Some consider it a strict no-no, others allow their babies self feed purees with a

preloaded spoon. Yet others serve purees to their babies without any utensils and they can eat them with fingers (hello, huge mess).

Anything that can interfere with a baby's decision regarding the amount and choice of food, is not consistent with Baby led Weaning.



### **What I love about Baby Led Weaning**

Babies introduced to solids using BLW can decide what and how much they want to eat and I see it as the biggest benefit of this approach.

Another bonus of Baby Led Weaning is the fact that your baby can be included in family meals and get exposure to the same foods the rest of the family is eating. This is extremely helpful in terms of the development of eating habits and skills.

Of course, if you spoon feed your baby it is also possible to include her in family meals but it is not always easy to feed a little one, yourself and help other children at the same time!

For example, I chose finger foods from the start with my third child because I wanted to be able to enjoy my own meals too, while she was self feeding.

In general, there has been very little research done in Baby Led Weaning area, but most of the studies we have to date have come to optimistic conclusions.

Since BLW babies are supposed to self-feed and cannot be forced into eating more or less than they want, their self-regulation appears to be strengthened and mealtimes tend to be more pleasant in general.

Other important benefits of BLW include less processed foods, exposure to a variety of foods and possibly more adventurous palates and better diets later on.

### **Is Baby Led Weaning doable?**

Yes! According to this review, about 68 per cent of 4-6 months old babies, 85% of 6-7 months old and 96% of 7-8 months old can grasp food with their hands. Here is a quote from this study:

“The motor skills that emerge around six months of age seem to allow the majority of infants to reach out and grasp food, and, based on the observational studies, it seems reasonable to expect that the majority of (although not all) infants could cope with self-feeding at six months.”

Another study observed that those babies who were self-feeding at 6 months were also more likely to talk and walk earlier. The interesting point the



researchers made was that parents who did not expect their babies to self-feed were not likely to offer finger foods even though their babies were ready.

The same study cautioned however:

“... baby-led weaning – which advocates babies feeding themselves solid foods, rather than being spoon fed purees – could lead to nutritional problems for the small number of children who develop later than average.”

Which brings us to ...

### **What worries me about Baby Led Weaning**

No research study has ever looked into how much BLW babies actually eat. But we know that babies, especially those that are breastfed, need to have good dietary sources of iron and zinc from about 6 months of age.

It is possible that skipping spoon feeding with purees may put some babies at a nutritional disadvantage. Some babies, and especially premies and “late bloomers” will not be ready to self feed at 6-7 months and may not get the important nutrients and calories.

Next, some BLW proponents say that feeding babies purees inevitably leads to pushing food on them or feeding them too little. But it is not necessarily true. It is possible to feed babies with a spoon in a responsive manner. A responsive, pressure free way to spoon feed will strengthen the ability to self-regulate and keep stress out of mealtimes.

Baby Led Weaning philosophy promotes sharing family meals with the baby which is a wonderful way to help the baby enjoy more variety and learn to eat what the rest of the family is eating. But in this case the family needs to prepare most meals from scratch and avoid adding salt or sugar when cooking.

Unfortunately, this is not the case for many families in the US or UK.

Choking is the final concern for parents starting BLW. There is very little research on this topic but some mothers in [this study](#) reported choking episodes when their babies were fed raw apple.

The babies were able to cough the pieces of apple out and did not require help. But it seems clear that raw apple, and any other hard food that can snap off easily is not a good option for feeding babies.

The good news is that recent [research](#) shows that as long as finger foods are safe, they are not any more likely to make your baby choke than purees or milk.

According to the [team conducting one study](#), foods to avoid are: “...anything that couldn’t be mashed on the roof of the mouth with the tongue; very small foods such as nuts, grapes, sweets and food with pits; raw veggies; under-ripe or hard fruit, including raw apple; citrus fruits, unless each segment had been peeled; whole nuts and popcorn; and foods cut into coins, such as sausages or carrots.”

Lots of babies fed the BLW way gag often, especially at the beginning. Gagging is pretty normal in babies and is a way for them to get rid of food that is too challenging for whatever reason (puree too thick, lumps too lumpy, pieces too big to swallow).

While gagging is not dangerous and can, in fact, protect from choking, some babies find it too distressing, especially if it is often accompanied by vomiting.



## The Mixed Approach

Some parents choose the conventional/puree approach to starting solids and others experiment with Baby Led Weaning. Both approaches can work great when the parents are guided by the baby's unique development.

And guess what?

It is also fine to mix both! Many feeding professionals, including myself, suggest that using a mixed approach may be the best solution for busy families.

Here is the mixed approach in a nut shell:

Once a baby is ready for solids he is offered some stick- or coin- shaped finger foods for self feeding practice AND some nutritious purees.

Purees are not mandatory, especially if the baby self feeds finger foods from the start, but they may serve a nutritional purpose by providing the additional iron babies need as well as a boost in eating skills.

As soon as the baby can handle smooth purees without problem, time to move on to chunkier textures. It is very important not to get "stuck" in the puree phase for too long.

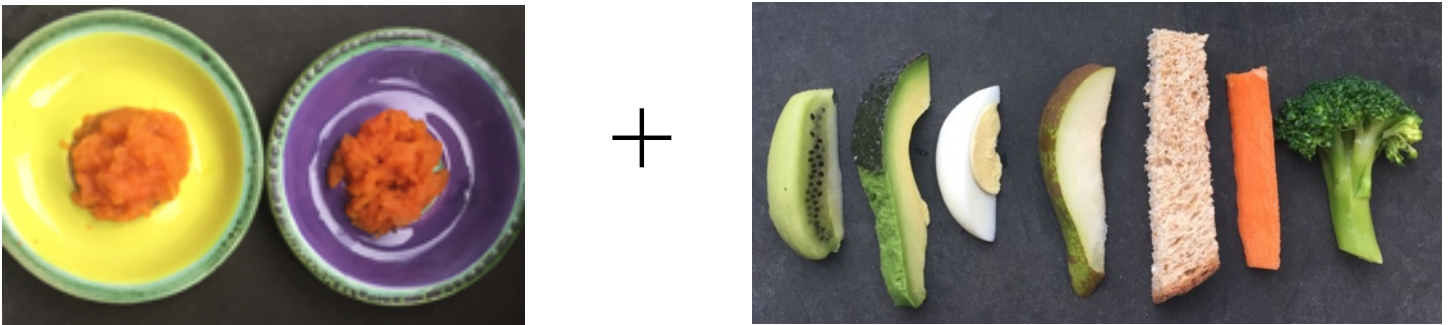
From about 8-10 months, when babies develop pincer grasp, finger foods can be cut in smaller pieces.

At around the same time, they can start practicing self feeding with a spoon as well. Most babies start refusing the spoon at around 8-10 months anyway. This is just one the ways for them to demonstrate their drive for independence.

With mixed approach, the main focus is on the development on self feeding skills, at the baby's unique pace and in safe way.

The baby can be fed smooth purees with a spoon at the start, but quickly transitions to more challenging textures.

## Mixed approach



Here are some of the reasons why I recommend the mixed approach:

1. **Eating skills.** With the mixed approach, your baby will get exposure to a variety of textures which is important for preventing future eating problems.

It is a win win situation. Your baby gets a boost in hand eye coordination and lots of sensory experience when eating finger foods and learns to manipulate purees in the mouth when being fed with a spoon. [Get a list of 65 easy whole food finger food ideas here.](#)

2. **Nutrition.** The amounts of solid foods babies will eat will be very small at the beginning, especially if you choose to feed your baby finger foods only.

At the same time, babies need solid sources of important nutrients such as iron and zinc, in their diet. Most finger foods that babies can manipulate at an early age are soft fruit and vegetables which are not good sources of iron or zinc. Serving your baby iron and zinc rich purees prepared from meat, chicken,

egg yolks, beans and greens can close potential nutritional gaps.

- 3. Flexibility.** Imagine yourself on a road with your 7 month old who only eats finger foods. It can be pretty difficult to set him up for a meal and clean up afterwards. But if you can feed him a pureed meal it can save you a lot of hassle and mess.
- 4. Peace of mind.** Some babies love finger foods and reject a spoon, others eat purees without any problem but need more time to develop self feeding skills and yet others eat both finger foods and purees without any problem from the start.

The mixed approach to solids is a perfect match for every baby, regardless of individual preferences and physiological challenges. If you are guided by your baby's development rather than strict guidelines, you get the best results with feeding.

- 5. Family meals.** With a mixed approach, it is easy to include the baby in family meals. Some parents find it convenient to feed the baby some puree at a snack time, when she is more likely to eat alone and have her join the family table at dinner, when everyone is at home and she can practice self feeding with finger foods.

Just remember that purees are not mandatory so feel free to skip them altogether if your baby does not enjoy them or eats plenty of finger foods.



Congratulations!

You can now confidently choose the best way to starting solids with your baby.

I hope you will try the mixed approach - the combination of Baby Led Weaning/finger foods and purees.

I have seen so many families successfully using it to start solids with their little ones, just like I did with my two youngest children

If you need more guidance on how to start solids using the mixed approach, what to buy, how to progress between textures, which finger foods and purees to prepare, easy recipes for your baby and the whole family, meal plans and feeding schedules, nutritional guides and videos of other babies eating - check my [Starting Solids the Stress Free Way bundle](#).

### Here is what you will get:

Starting Solids the Stress Free Way - 50 page ebook

Recipe Pack: Cooking for Your baby and the Whole Family - 50 page ebook

Nutritional ABCs: Best sources of important nutrients for your baby - bonus pdf

Starting Solids: Sample schedules and meal plans - bonus pdf

Toddler Feeding 101: all you need to know to get ready for the picky toddler phase - bonus pdf

A collection of videos of babies eating finger food and purees

Yours,

Natalia

