

How to stop breastfeeding ... quickly

Breastfeeding usually stops slowly over weeks or months when both mother and baby are ready. This is called weaning.

It is uncommon, but sometimes breastfeeding must be stopped quickly.

Some reasons why you may have to stop breastfeeding quickly include:

- You develop a serious medical condition (such as cancer) and must begin treatment right away. The treatment may not be safe during breastfeeding.
- Your baby is no longer in your care and you do not wish to continue to breastfeed.

Some women are told that they must stop breastfeeding to have medical tests, procedures or surgery. This is rarely necessary. Please check with a lactation consultant and talk about your options before you wean your baby. Breastfeeding may need to be stopped for a time, but many families can begin breastfeeding again if they wish.

If weaning your baby quickly is your only option, the following suggestions may make you and your baby more comfortable.

What to do when you need to stop breastfeeding

Wear a bra that supports your breasts, but is not too tight. Put cotton breast pads inside the cups of your bra in case your milk leaks. Do not bind or wrap your breasts tightly against your chest. This can be painful and cause problems such as plugged milk ducts or an infection called mastitis.

Do not take medication to "dry up" your milk. This type of medication is not safe for mothers.

Drink when you are thirsty. You do not need to drink less.

If your breasts are tender or painful, a gentle massage can help.
Try massaging your breasts during a warm shower.

Wrap ice packs in cloth and put them on your breasts for up to 20 minutes, several times a day. Some women use refrigerated cabbage leaves on their breasts instead of ice. Change the cabbage leaves often. Do not eat the cabbage leaves after using.

Take a mild pain medication such as acetaminophen (Tylenol[®]) or ibuprofen (Advil[®] or Motrin[®]) to reduce pain and swelling.

You may get a fever when you wean quickly. This can last 3 to 4 days. Keep drinking fluids and take acetaminophen to lower the fever.

If your breasts are very full and nothing relieves the pain, you may remove a little milk from your breasts. Hand express or pump the least amount of milk that you can to relieve the pain and swelling. Do not empty your breasts or your body will make more milk.




You may feel disappointed or down, and a bit unwell. Give yourself time and be patient. It will only take a few days to get back to normal.

Your baby may need help too, as he or she has been used to breastfeeding. Spend lots of time with your baby, cuddling and helping him or her get used to feeding another way. Give your baby time. You may need other support people to help you and baby through this time.

There are many people who can answer questions or help you at home.



Some choices are:

-  your doctor or midwife
-  a lactation consultant
-  a public health nurse