The Surprising Secret Behind Babies That Wean Like Champs

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Tovey: Hello everyone. And thank you for joining me on this week's podcast of sense by Meg Faure, the podcast that helps parents make sense of the early years of parenting. I'm your host Tovey Gant, a mom of three small humans and avid sense fan. For those of you who are new to this podcast, Meg is a renowned occupational therapist, best selling author.

And founder of the sense series books, which provides practical guidance on baby and child development weekly. I managed to pin make down to discuss some of the most thorny and common parenting questions. This week, we're going to be diving into the world of weaning, which can at times feel like solving an impossible puzzle.

In this episode, we sitting down with Meg, who has written a bestselling book called weaning sense and allergy sense to try and unravel the mysteries of transitioning your little one to solid food. From the bewildering array of information out there, to the common challenges parents face, we're here to make your weaning journey a little less perplexing.

Get ready to clear up confusion and gain some valuable insights into the art of baby [00:01:00] weaning. Welcome back Meg!

Meg: Hello, it's always good to be here with you. And I just love this topic this week, that the topic of weaning, I know a couple of moms actually Cassidy, who used to be on our podcast, we tracked Max's whole first year.

And if any moms haven't heard that, they must go back and listen to it. But before she had Max, she said to me, the most exciting part of parenting that she was most looking forward to was weaning the baby, like all the food prep and so on. Let me tell you, she didn't feel that way at about six months of age.

Tovey: I was going to say, you know. As I said, I've got three and not one of them has weaned the same way. Not one of them likes the same food, not one of them. So none of the lessons I learned from my previous child or children have I been able to pass through? So just like navigating a minefield each time and feeling like you are equally as overwhelmed as it is unprepared and as unstructured every single time and it's just I was like you'd think by the third Like there would be some commonalities and I'd have it waxed, absolutely not .

Meg: [00:02:00].

Yeah, no, look, every journey is different and there's so many different ways of weaning babies and I think that's also what's thorny for moms, what do we feed our babies? Are jarred foods okay? Do we have to home make everything, and then all the different types of weaning, baby led weaning, colab weaning, which we talk about in weaning sense.

So there's so many questions that moms have.

Tove: So, you've just opened up one, and I'm probably not going in a very good structure here, but you've just opened up one. The mom guilt that sits around, not making all your food by yourself and, using an Ellipak or a purity bottle.

Please. Tell me I can use my Ellipak because my cupboard that is chock a block full with Ellipax would just make me feel that much better.

Meg: There is definitely a place for convenience foods when it comes to babies. we know we're busy moms. Life happens. We do need to have convenience foods.

Having said that. Homemade food is the gold standard. I'm sorry, but yeah, let's unpack that a little bit, if you are going to use [00:03:00] jarred food or pouch food, I'm going to give you a couple of principles here. The first thing is that when you're going to go and buy those foods, have a look at the label and get really okay with actually reading those labels.

So in the weaning sense book, we actually have a whole section on label reading. So if you haven't got the weaning sense book, go and get it. But here's the clear principle. The less number of ingredients on an ingredients list, the better the food, the minute the ingredients list has got five or six things on it, it's unlikely to only be food that's included.

It's likely to be something chemical as well. So that's the first thing, few numbers of ingredients. Second principle is if you can't eat it or pick it off a tree, that means it's been chemically manufactured or manufactured. And. Being put into your food. And an example of that is an E number. You've never seen an E number tree.

You've never seen a modified starch tree. So those two things don't exist in a farm. Try not to have foods that have those in. So read those labels because they will have modified starch and E numbers in them, and you don't want those. So

that's the [00:04:00] second principle. The third principle is if it says butternut, then your first ingredient on that label should be Butternut because the, first ingredient by labels are supposed to be listed with the number in proportion to the number of ingredients.

In other words, the majority one comes first. If the majority one that comes first is modified starch or water, it means that it's filled with almost nothing. And then all the nutrition comes later. So those are your label principles. The next thing that I want to say is that we can never get our food as smooth as jars and pouches are.

And so it can lead to picky eating because what happens is that your baby gets very used to the silky smooth texture of what's in a pouch or a jar. And so when they need to go into mushed food or textured food, they are more picky. So that's the second principle is that's why I don't love them.

That's a home cooked food will always be a better option because we'll never get it that smooth. And then finally, the last thing I want to say about it is that I have a real issue with little kitties sacking food out of parched spots. [00:05:00] I'm sorry, Tovey. It really is. It's a massive bugbear. I know, but it's so bad for them.

It's bad for obesity and weight. It's bad for their mouth and their fine motor skills. Think about what you have to do when there's a. Plate of food in front of you, got a utensil in your hand and you're scooping it off your plate into your mouth. There's so much going on when you stick a pouch in your baby's hand with a spout and think that you're ticking the nutrition box, all you're doing is ticking the nutrition box and actually not in the best way either.

So. Yeah, when it comes to shop bought food, I'm sorry, and I'm not trying to load the guilt because I really am not, but for me, if you want to know what the gold standard is, you do need to have those things in the back of your mind. And then on the other hand, you've got to know that life happens.

You're a busy mom. And in the occasion where you stick a pouch in your baby's hand and it's got an e number on the label, your baby's not going to die.

Tove: Okay. Well, at least we can keep that in perspective on the back of my mind. And now I feel like we're going to go backwards a bit, but I guess one of the starting points behind the whole weaning journey [00:06:00] is what is the main concept behind baby led weaning and how does it differ from the traditional weaning methods that are out there?

Meg:

Yeah. So let's actually break weaning methodologies or theories into three parts, into three. One is the old historical weaning, which was mom has a bowl of food. She has got a certain number of mils in that bowl of food that she wants to feed her baby. She's going to shovel that food into her baby's mouth.

And that's a traditional form of weaning. And that's probably the way that most of us were weaned. Okay. Then there is baby led weaning, which became very trendy towards I think probably about 15 years ago. And baby led weaning says your baby will wean only when they can actually feed themselves.

In other words, the mother does not feed the baby. So out goes the bowl, out goes the spoon, out goes the mush and incomes. Whole steamed food that's super soft, that the baby can handle themselves, that they can pick up in their hand and they can suck on, eat and take in the nutrients. An example of which would be a [00:07:00] broccoli floret, like one of those nice tender stem broccolis.

That's a great example of a piece of food that's got a handle because that's the stem of the broccoli. It's well steamed. The baby can actually suck and eat it off. I'm going to bring, come to the problems with that later, but that's baby led weaning. And it is very much led by the baby. It's very much baby feeding themselves.

And the mom is just really a facilitator in the whole process. And then the third type of weaning, which is the weaning that Kath McGaw and I speak about in weaning sense. Is a very balanced approach to weaning. So this is what we call CoLab weaning, which is, and the word CoLab obviously talks about it being collaborative that it is baby led, but mom guided, and it really is mom guided as well.

So there is place for a bowl. There is place for a spoon. There is place for the mom feeding the baby and not the baby only feeding themselves, but it is guided by the baby as well. And so, the word CoLab is actually made up of an acronym. The first, the letter is Q's, so understanding your baby's Q's for weaning, the O stands for own [00:08:00] personality the L stands for led by science, and that's a very important part because the led by science shows us that baby led, pure baby led weaning is not good for our babies, and we'll talk about that, that led by science.

A stands for age appropriate what do we do at each different stage. And then the B stands for baby led, which means that the baby will actually guide the weaning process. So colab weaning is much more of a dance between a mom and a baby or a parent and a baby as we start to introduce foods. So yes, we do have bowls.

Yes, we do have mush and yes, we do have whole steamed food that baby can handle themselves.

Tovey: Okay. Amazing. And what is the recommended age to start baby led weaning and what are the signs we should look for to determine when our baby is ready to start this journey?

Meg: Yeah, so that kind of brings us to one of the problems with baby lead weaning.

So baby lead weaning is very fashionable, lots of people talk about it, it sounds all faddy and it is actually just really a fad. But the problem with baby lead weaning lies in exactly the question [00:09:00] you've asked, which is at what age can babies start to baby lead wean? And the honest answer to that question is that babies are actually only developmentally ready to start baby led weaning when they can hold something, get it to their mouth in sufficient quantity and with good enough coordination that they can get in enough nutrients to cover the nutritional needs.

So if you gave, if you followed baby led weaning with a four month old, who's starting to get their hands to their mouth, it's fairly obvious that they would never be able to get in enough nutrients because they're not coordinated enough. So in order to do. Good baby led weaning babies need to be a little older and it happens at around about seven months when they can actually hold something, even using the broccoli as a tool to like scoop up the hummus, for instance, whatever it is, they need a certain level of developmental skill.

The problem is that developmental skill, when that develops at seven months. It has not quite kept up with what is needed nutritionally, which happens between four and six months. And that's our lag. That's where we worry a little bit. [00:10:00] The other reason why we worry a little bit is that if you delay weaning until seven months for them to feed themselves and kind of the only onto lots of flavors from seven, eight, nine months, then you moving into our first picky eating patch, which is where little ones are not as receptive to new flavors.

So you almost want to catch the ones when they're really receptive to new flavors, which is between four and seven months of age, but. The problem with that is that they're not able to coordinate enough for the baby led weaning.

Tovey: So that's obviously where the collab weaning allows the best of both worlds, right?

So probably in the beginning when baby can't, not dexterous enough that we start kind of really mom facilitates the process. And as they get older and they can, that process is just shared with the self weaning piece. So I guess one of the big questions around that is how do we know?

From a like a co lab weaning perspective, one of the pieces you mentioned was the baby's personality that I assume links back to our sensory personalities. Can we unpack that a little bit?

Meg: Yeah. So the O [00:11:00] in co lab weaning is own personality and knowing your baby's sensory personality is a real coup when it comes to weaning.

Babies with different sensory personalities wean differently. And so for instance, your social butterfly is likely to be a fabulous baby lead weaner. So the moms who shouting and screaming and saying, yeah, my baby's doing so well with baby lead weaning. They might very well have a social butterfly, social butterflies love to do it themselves.

They often are slightly advanced in terms of their motor skills. So they'll, they might be able to baby lead wean a little earlier. They show massive interest in food early on. And so they are actually ready to lead the process. I mean, our social butterflies like to move on. They like to pioneer. And so they're going to lead the process.

So baby led weaning works well with them. With your slow to warm up baby, they don't want to touch anything. Anything that is new is like, guilty until it's proven innocent. So now you're going to put a broccoli floret on the plate and they're going to be like, no, I'm not touching that thing. And so, your sensory personality can [00:12:00] impact your weaning journey and obviously can negatively then impact your baby led weaning, weaning journey.

So with. When we understand our sensory personalities, which is one of the things that we do in the weaning sense book is we take you through knowing your baby's sensory personality. It helps us to wean better. So here's an

example. I have a social butterfly, my first born. And he was ready to wean quite early.

He was super interested in solids. He was really interested in foods. He wanted to move on to, he wasn't interested in the milk anymore. So I introduced him onto rice cereal because in his twenties now, so that was back in the day when rice cereal was still recommended for babies as first foods.

So I gave him rice cereal and he was like, Oh my gosh, this is awesome. Like this is so exciting. I'm having rice cereal for about a week. And then he was like, huh? Why are you giving me more of the same? And that is exactly what social butterflies do. They don't want more of the same. They want the novelty.

So with our social butterflies, you introduce rapidly, you introduce lots of color, you do lots of different texture, you do lots of different spices and herbs. And that Cape [00:13:00] Malay curry that you think you can't give to a baby, you. Jump right in with your social butterfly. They'll love that. So that's an example of one sensory personality.

You're sensitive and slow to warm up babies. They need to be taken much slower. They want to stick on rice cereal for a while. You got to start to add more flavor into the rice cereal so you can move them onto new flavors. They often don't like new foods. If a food is brightly colored, like they were only used to orange food, like butternut and carrot.

And now you introduce green broccoli. It's like, huh? What is this? Babies do wean differently and I think it's so important because it helps us as moms, and you mentioned early on, , you opened this whole conversation with the mom guilt thing. And, you know, there's a lot of guilt that sits around this, like everybody else's baby looks like they wean so well, mine doesn't.

But when you understand your baby in the context of their social, of their sensory personality, takes the weight off of you having, to do it perfectly.

Tovey: Yeah. There's without a doubt, Nova for me is a social butterfly and just has the attention span of a goldfish and just wants [00:14:00] more and more and different things.

Grey was sensitive and didn't want to touch anything and have to be very slowly weaned into everything and almost forced into it. And Jagger was very settled. So he was just like, whatever you put in front of me, it's cool. I'm not gonna

stress about it. But again, like completely different journeys, completely different paces.

And definitely feel like with Nova being the last, she's also eating the chaos. So I tend to throw her pieces of the other kids foods that I would have waited ages to do with Jagger and Nova Jagger and Gray. But with her, I'm like, it'll be fine. She won't choke. I hear it on the side that you go running back.

But generally you just feel like, she's in the noise. She's getting given stuff a lot quicker than what I did with the others. So I guess one of the things to, unpack is striking the balance which you've spoken through on the collab weaning versus the baby sense.

The baby led weaning is , the balance between allowing a baby to explore and self feeding during the weaning process, which is obviously a very important[00:15:00] as mentioned, the play milestone and physical and gross motor and fine motor milestone piece that they're actually doing by doing that.

Textures all that kind of exposure. And making sure that they're getting that adequate nutrition

So we want to make sure they sleep, which is generally, I'm not even going to lie, mom guilt aside. I will let Nova do her thing. And if I feel like she hasn't eaten enough, I'm like pushing a sack into her or banana into her, because I'm like, you will sleep, please. I'm not sure if you're a hundred percent full yet.

so Yeah, how do we strike that balance?

Meg: the balance between getting the right amount of food in and giving them control. Is that what you say? Yeah. Yeah. So yeah, look, a couple of things. And this is, I always talk about the mom's responsibilities and the baby's responsibilities.

So ultimately we actually want to give our babies complete control over how much they eat. Okay. So this is freaking all the A types out. Yeah. Thanks. So in an ideal world, Nova will decide how much she's [00:16:00] eaten. She will close her lips at the end of a meal, even if it's only two mouthfuls, and she will push the ball away and dump it on the floor.

If you've really tried to, get that extra mouthful in and you should be going, all right, that's fine. You are telling me that you've had enough. Now I can see, and

every single A type mom in the audience is going, no chance is my baby controlling that. But really that is what we should be doing.

Babies should control their own appetite because they have a natural instinct for controlling their appetite. And as long as we are feeding them within their sensory personalities, it should work quite well. Having said that, there are some things that we have to do as parents, and this falls into our control domain that will ensure that we can go.

We can give them the control that we can go. Okay. It's fine. She knows what she's doing. So these are the very important principles, the things we have to do. The first thing is we have to give adequate number of opportunities for taking in solids. And that means three solid meals and two snacks from the age of about six, seven months, they're [00:17:00] actually having five eating outings in a day, literally five times, five meals.

And so that's breakfast. Mid morning snack, lunch, mid afternoon snack and dinner. Okay. So those are your five eating outings. Now you can imagine if she closes her mouth, snap shut after the second mouthful of lunch, but she's got a snack coming up in two hours. You can go, that's fine. That's all she wanted to eat.

Snack time. She'll open. And of course, 90 percent of the time she will, because now she's had opportunity to generate an appetite. So first thing is timing of meals. Second thing is very importantly, we need to protect their appetites. We can only do this. We can only let them control how much they eat of solids.

If we protect their appetite and the way we do that is by not feeding too much milk. And I think that's often what happens is that our baby doesn't eat very well today because she's a bit niggly. She's a bit full. She's got a snotty nose. Well, the wind blew in a different direction, whatever it was, it could have been anything.

And [00:18:00] so that night she wakes up maybe one extra time, not related to the food, just because the wind was blowing. And we go, Oh my gosh, she must be hungry because she didn't eat yesterday. So what I'll do is I will give her now an extra bottle. So now what happens is that nutrition that she's taking, that bottle gets stolen from tomorrow's meals.

So now she really is fussy tomorrow because she's had too many bottles. And the next night, instead of one extra bottle, we now have got two extra bottles. And so we end up, and I see it all the time today. We end up with moms who do three or four feeds in the night. And then they're wondering why their baby's not eating solids in the day.

So you can't let them control their solids appetite. And it's you. Or controlling their milk intake. So that's the second very important principle. So it's when they, how many outings of solids controlling their milk intake. The next thing is the what. So if you are going to give your baby processed carbohydrates, high sugar food, lots of fruit juice, you're going to absolutely ruin their appetite instincts.

And the reason is that when, let's say you go and drink a little square box of a carton of apple juice, which I mean, I can't [00:19:00] believe it, but we used to do this to our children when I was raising my kiddies. We used to, we thought, Oh, fruit juice is so healthy. Give them a box of, liquid fruit.

We wouldn't do that now. We would give them water or super dilute fruit juice, like almost nothing in it. The problem with fruit juice, sweets, cakes, all of that is that the sugar spikes the blood sugar level spikes, and then it drops down and then they're suddenly very hungry again, and then they become grazers.

So that's when you end up with a little one who's grazing from one meal to the next. You have no idea how much they've eaten in the day, and they're not having these nice, healthy eating outings. And so you can't give them the control. So giving them the control. The caveat to that is that you need to control certain things as well.

And when you're doing that, when you're controlling the, when the, how much milk and the, what , you can then hand over the control to them to be able to to decide on how much in a meal.

Tovey: Okay. That'll make sense, especially the sweet one. Cause I definitely notice if my kids have been to a party or be exposed in some way, the grazing levels just shoot up.

Meg:

Yeah. And the irritability. I was going to say the [00:20:00] irritability. And you give them a bottle because they're irritable. So just watch it and please don't give them fruit juice, give them water. They don't need fruit juice.

Tovey: Yeah, no, my ones, none of them have ever had produce and they also just don't like it.

I think someone tried to give grace on the other day and she was like, no, which I was like, yes, that's perfect. So, we've kind of unpacked the sensory personalities and because they're all so different and there's such different strategies feed them and engage with them on this journey, I guess, is there like a standard,-blanket state of.

Of principles or strategies for introducing food to babies, regardless of what sensory personality.

Meg: They are. Yeah. Look, I think that comes into the lead by science part of the collab weaning. So lead by science tells us a couple of principles that is irrelevant of what sensory personality they are.

And that is that you must not introduce solids before 17 weeks. We know that is not good for babies, but we must have them on solids. By six months of age. So that gives us a window from 17 to 24 weeks, approximately [00:21:00] says sometime in that gap, they can be introduced to solids. And that's when you can then start to look at things like cues and sensory personalities.

So the led by science gives us our window and our parameters, and then the sensory personality and our cues will give us exactly when we start. So, it does become a little bit of a balancing act, and it isn't all about sensory personality and in,

Tovey: terms of if you have a preemie for any moms listening, you have preemie babies.

Do we start the weaning journey on their chronological age, on their adjusted age? How,

Meg: how does that shift? So you do start at, on their adjusted age. But you do need to make sure that they are having solids by the time , and today, this is a question that really we need cath to answer because there's just so much information out there that isn't always clear.

But the rule of thumb is adjusted

Tovey: edge. Okay. Yeah. Cause I know that's cool. I had a pre obviously Nova was preemie and I know that for me, it was quite a stressful journey was trying to figure out. Do I do it on a [00:22:00] chronological, I didn't want to introduce it too late, but I didn't want to introduce it too early as well, knowing that there's obviously some challenges.

Meg: Yeah. The bottom line with all prems and this is the latest guideline that Kath is putting out and that is began neonatal ICU working group in Europe has put out is that all prem babies must start solids at 17 weeks. Corrected edge, adjusted edge.

So, we don't say that for full term babies, for full term babies. They don't have to start at 17 weeks. They can start anytime up to 24 weeks, but your prem baby is not actually 17 weeks. If she was four weeks, she's actually 21 weeks. So when we hit 17 weeks adjusted age or corrected age, that is when she must start.

So, that's the first principle. But with prem babies, the other principle is, and this is why I said, it's a little bit thorny for prem babies who are born at 32 weeks gestational age. So eight weeks early. So really little pens or older. So 32 weeks or older, [00:23:00] they can start solids at 13 weeks.

Corrected age, as long as there's no history of neck and no history of gut issues. So that's why, that second piece. You need to see your healthcare professional. The rule of thumb, if everybody wants a black and white kind of rule of thumb is 17 weeks corrected age.

Tovey: Okay, Well, thanks Meg.

Thanks so much for is there any other words of wisdom that we can leave parents with before?

Meg: Yeah. Look, I think the weaning journey doesn't have to be fraught. there are a couple of principles and I think almost the best principle I was thinking about this when we were talking about baby led weaning, which is the baby actually has the capacity to take the food in their hands.

And it was a story that I actually, that played out in my own life. My son, as I said, was a social butterfly. He at 14 weeks old was like super interested in the world and ready to wean showing us the signals of it. And we obviously don't wean them at that age. And it was within a couple of weeks of that, that he, we were sitting around at a table a Sunday table with my mother in law who's a very instinctive mother and who I get [00:24:00] on very well with.

And she handed him a drumstick. And of course I completely freaked out because I was like, Oh, it's not 17 weeks yet. He's too little. And anyway, it's going to go into rice cereal. And in those days we thought chicken was an allergen and it was all of these things. But the truth is that's exactly how babies were weaned a hundred. 200 years ago, they sat around a table in a community while they were sitting there, the mom might choose something in her mouth, pass it to a baby and feed it across to him. He might be given things as soon as he was dexterous enough to be able to hold onto something to be able to chew on, even if it wasn't for nutritional reasons like that drumstick.

And I think. By over sciencing things and by this, in this modern world, it's become maybe too much of a science. The food needs to be prepared like that, offered like this, frozen like that, not, it's got the E numbers and not the E numbers, . So if we go back to the very early principles of how people would have been weaned a hundred years ago.

It's got to come out the garden. It's got to be natural. It's got to be off a family table. And it's got to be when they're showing interest and when they're [00:25:00] ready, and if you take those principles, like you'd debunking weaning, you saying, okay, so that is, and so the only science that needs to come into it really is something like.

Let's not wean before 17 weeks because baby's guts aren't ready, which unfortunately a hundred years ago, they probably were weaning before then. But other than that, you can be quite instinctive about it and move through it without too much, without overthinking it too much. Well,

Tovey: I think those are all very helpful tips for moms and parents out there on the journey and hopefully removing some of the guilt and some of the stress and anxiety and Dr.Google,

thank you for your time.

Meg: Thank you, Tovey. It was so lovely. And thanks for joining us. Moms. We'll chat again next week. We'll chat soon. Bye.