Guide to Weaning from Breast/Bottle Feeding

A gentle, evidence-informed approach to ending your breast/bottle feeding journey, written by a lactation counselor, doula, and pediatric sleep consultant.

by Olivia Fox

What is Weaning & When to Start

Understanding Weaning

Weaning is the gradual process of transitioning your baby from breastfeeding or bottle to other nourishment. It includes emotional, nutritional, and physical changes. Types include baby-led and parent-led weaning.

Timing Guidelines

The AAP recommends exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months and continued breastfeeding for 1 year or longer. Look for signs of readiness: eating solids, less interest in nursing, and longer sleep stretches. Consult your pediatrician when weaning before 12 months.

Why Wait Until 12 Months?

Immune Support

Breastmilk antibodies support immune health

Brain Development

DHA supports brain development

Easier Transition

Easier transition to cow's milk

Bonding

Reinforces comfort and bonding

Gradual vs. Abrupt Weaning

Gradual Weaning

Gradual weaning reduces risk of mastitis, engorgement, and emotional stress. Drop one feeding every few days.

Abrupt Weaning

Abrupt weaning may be necessary for medical reasons and requires support. Replace nursing with cuddles, routines, and other bonding rituals.

Weaning by Age – Under 12 Months & 12–24 Months

Under 12 Months

- Replace breastfeeding with expressed milk or formula
- Drop one feed every 5–7 days
- Consult your pediatrician

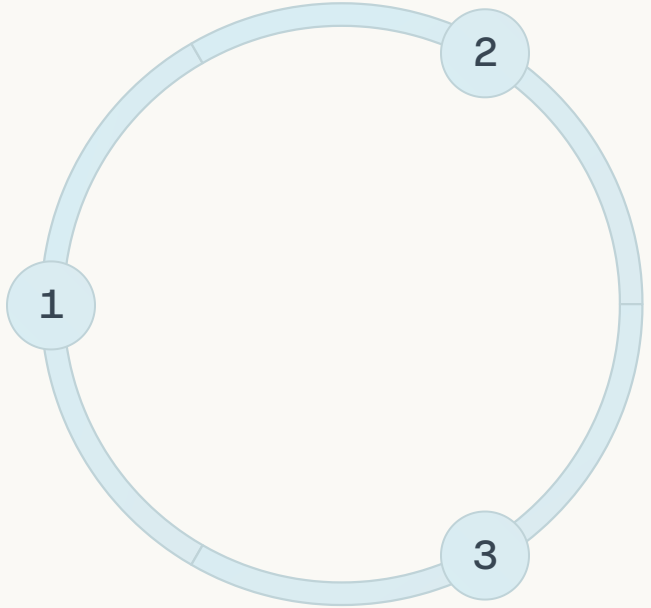
12–24 Months

- Drop midday feed first
- Offer water/snacks and routines
- Use affirming language: "Milk is all done. Now we play!"

Weaning After 2 Years & Emotional Aspects

Comfort Nursing

Older toddlers nurse for comfort. Use verbal preparation, visual aids, and slow transitions.



Complex Emotions

Expect complex emotions—grief, guilt, relief. Weaning is a shift in connection, not a loss of it.

New Routines

Replace nursing with consistent bonding routines.

Night Weaning Overview

1

Start After 5–7 Months

Recommended after 5–7 months with pediatrician's approval.

2

First Night Feed

Start with the first night feed (usually 10–11 PM). Reduce by 1 minute nursing or ½ oz bottle nightly, then repeat every night until fully weaned.

3

Comfort Without Feeding

Provide comfort without feeding—rocking, pacifier, hand on chest.

Night Weaning – Middle & Early Morning Feeds

1

Drop First Feed

Once the first feed is dropped, tackle the early morning one (around 4–5 AM), then the middle of the night.

2

Gradual Reduction

Use the same approach of gradual reduction. Be consistent.

3

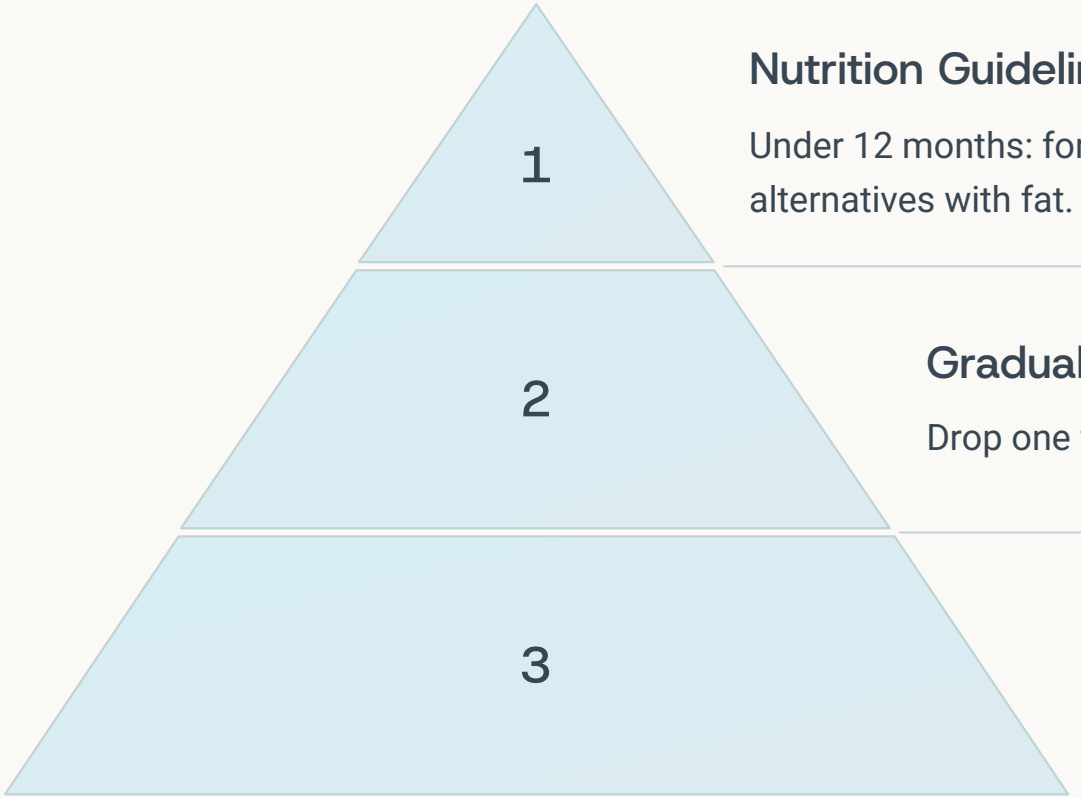
Sleep Environment

White noise and dark environments can help.

FAQs:

- "Can I night wean while co-sleeping?" Yes, but it may be easier with separate sleep spaces.
- "What if baby wakes crying?" Comfort without feeding and stay consistent.

Nutrition After Weaning & Preventing Discomfort



Nutrition Guidelines

Under 12 months: formula or breastmilk. Over 12 months: whole milk or milk alternatives with fat. Focus on nutrient-dense solids—iron, protein, healthy fats.

Gradual Approach

Drop one feed at a time. Use gentle massage in the shower.

Comfort Measures

Avoid tight bras. Don't pump to empty breasts when engorged.

Home Remedies & What NOT to Do

1

Helpful Remedies

Relieve discomfort with: Haakaa with Epsom salt, hanging breasts in warm water, gentle massage

2

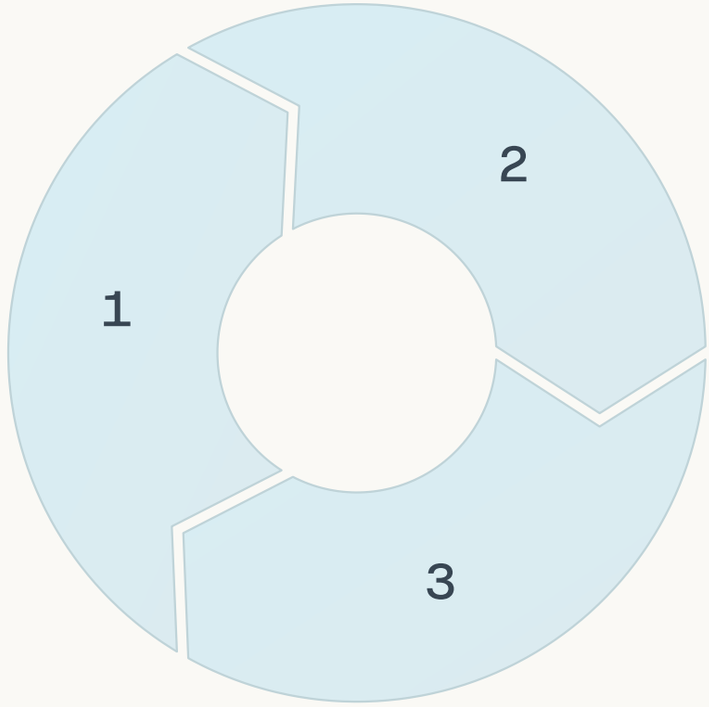
Things to Avoid

Avoid: Abrupt weaning of multiple feeds, binding breasts, ignoring fever or pain, fully draining engorged breasts

Weaning fully from the Bottle – When & How

Start Around 12–18 Months

Start bottle weaning around 12–18 months.



Gradual Replacement

Drop one bottle every few days. Replace with straw or open cups.

Address Emotions

Focus on emotional reasons behind bottle use

FAQs:

- "Which cup is best?" Straw or open cup
- "How long does it take?" 2–4 weeks typically

Bottle Weaning – Bedtime & Emotional Support

Shift Bedtime Bottles

Bedtime bottles are hard to drop. Shift them earlier in the routine, then replace with stories or snuggles. Offer water in a cup if needed.

Emotional Support

Support your toddler emotionally—let them choose their cup, involve them in drink prep, and avoid switching back and forth.

Positive Reinforcement

Praise effort and normalize the change.

Bottle Weaning – Mealtime Integration

3

Daily Meals

Encourage cup use at meals. Offer water or milk during every snack and mealtime.

1

Model Behavior

Model cup use. Drop daytime bottles first, then morning, then bedtime.

Make mealtimes predictable and fun. This structure builds confidence and comfort in new routines.

Dealing with Resistance & Sibling Transitions

Resistance Strategies	Sibling Support
Resistance is normal. Stay calm and don't reintroduce dropped feeds.	Acknowledge their emotions, include them in new routines.
Offer extra comfort. It's okay to pause and try again later.	Reassure them they're still just as loved.

Sleep Transitions During Weaning

Temporary Regressions

Temporary sleep regressions are common. Reinforce sleep with consistent routines. You can continue weaning during regressions.

Comfort Objects

Offer loveys or comfort objects. Stay responsive but avoid creating new sleep habits that will be hard to break.

Sample Weaning Timeline



Daytime Feeds: Drop midday first → then morning → then bedtime

Night Feeds: Drop first (10–11 PM) → last (4–5 AM) → middle

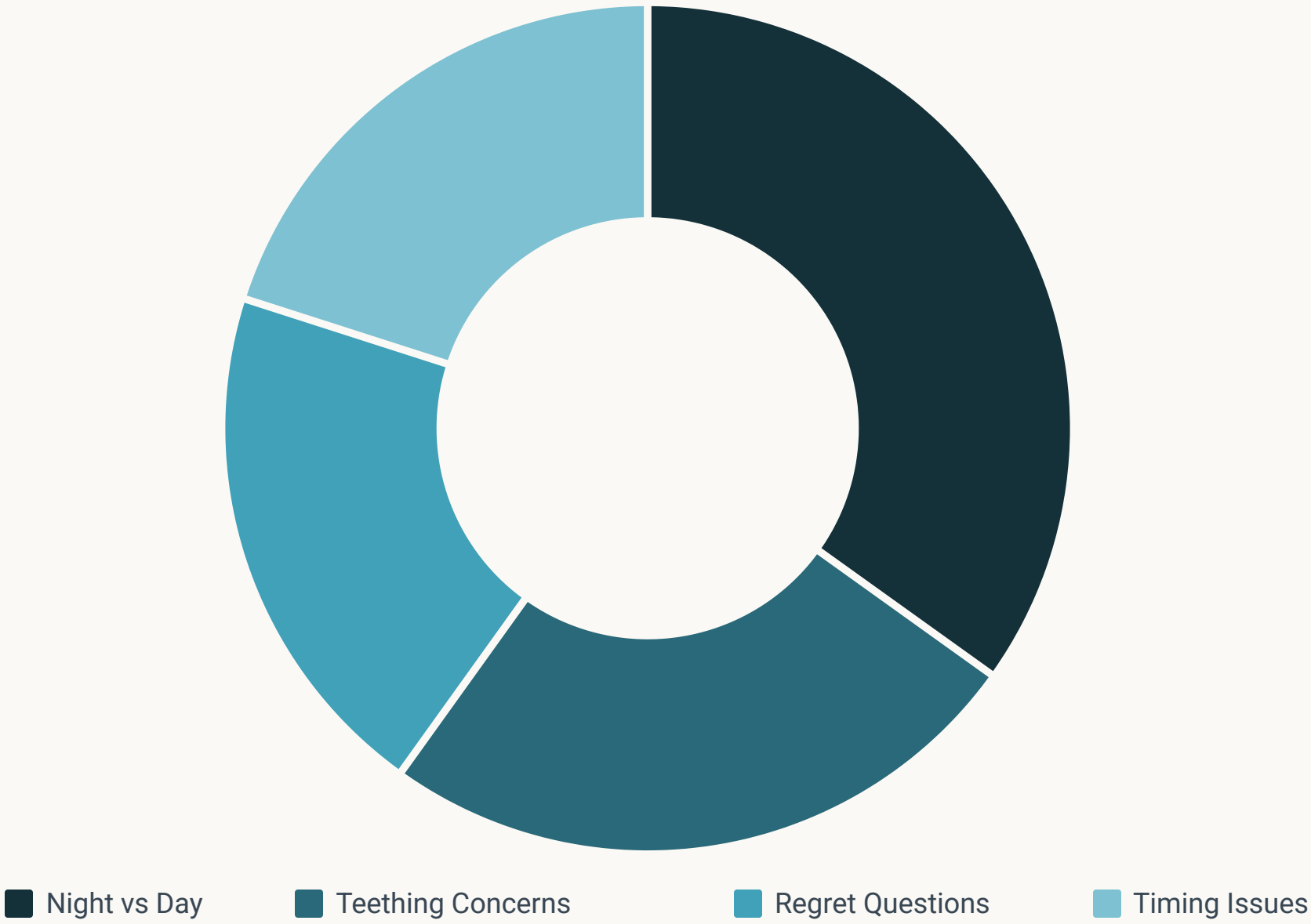
Bottles: Drop Daytime first→ then morning → then bedtime

It is important to only drop one feed at a time, and when breastfeeding you only drop by 1 min per feeding until it is fully weaned, then move to the next feeding.

When bottle feeding, drop one feed at a time, and drop by ½ ounce per feed until fully weaning, then move to the next feeding

Wait 3–7 days between changes. Use gentle distraction and comfort to guide the transition.

Common FAQs



- "Can I breastfeed at night and wean during the day?" Yes—just be consistent.
- "Can I wean if my baby is teething?" You can, but expect some pushback.
- "What if I regret weaning?" It's okay to adjust and resume if needed.

There's no one perfect path—trust yourself.

Tools & Resources

Professional Support

IBCLCs for guidance and reassurance. Local support groups. Pediatricians and family therapists for added support.

Educational Resources

Books: *The Nursing Mother's Guide to Weaning*, *Mothering Your Nursing Toddler*

Digital Tools

Apps to track feeds and transitions

Encouragement & Emotional Support

Weaning is a big emotional transition. Honor your journey and how far you've come. Whether breastfeeding lasted weeks or years, your love and dedication shaped your baby's life. This process is not the end of connection—it's the evolution of it.

Final Words

There is no perfect way to wean. Follow your baby's cues, trust your instincts, and go at your pace.

You've nurtured your baby with your body, your love, and your presence—and that's what matters most.

You've got this. ❤️

Medical Disclaimer:
The information provided in this guide is for educational and informational purposes only and is not intended as medical advice. Fox & Cub Family Wellness does not provide medical diagnosis, treatment, or prescriptions. Always consult with a qualified healthcare provider regarding any medical concerns or before making decisions related to your health or your child’s health.