

Book Review

Gill Rapley and Tracey Murkett. *Baby-led Weaning. Helping your Baby to Love Good Food*. London: Vermilion, 2008. £10.99, pp. 256. ISBN 978 0 09192380 8.

'Baby-led weaning' describes a novel method of weaning or complementary feeding (introduction of solids). This method differs from traditional practice, in that the infant is in control of when he starts eating solids, what he eats, how much he eats, and feeding himself. The infant is offered solid family foods, not the traditional purées (although mashed foods and runny foods can be provided), so there is no spoon-feeding by the parent. In addition, the infant is not persuaded to eat certain foods or to eat more, but is simply allowed to choose from the foods given.

This book consists of eight main sections, starting with an interesting, detailed explanation of baby-led weaning and how it works, followed by practical sections on how to start baby-led weaning, first foods, later foods, plus baby-led weaning and family life. The general section on healthy eating is good but would benefit from a greater and more accurate focus on infant guidelines. The final section on troubleshooting takes the format of questions and answers and covers potential problems very effectively, although it should be noted that the UK recommendation for starting solids is 'at 6 months' (not 'from 6 months' as quoted), the advice given relating to this recommendation and to commencing solids being debateable. The appendices include a brief description of the small research project by Rapley, which provided the basis for this method of weaning.

Baby-led weaning is described in a simple, practical manner, which makes for an easy to follow, enjoyable read, suitable for both parents and health professionals. This approach is enhanced by the photographs of infants self-feeding at different ages, by the 'question and answer' sections and the tips, and by the many case studies and comments from parents and from health professionals, including health visitors, nutritionists and dietitians.

The main strengths of this book are the depth of discussion regarding the importance of the main constructs of baby-led weaning, namely self-feeding and solids, and a greater explanation of complementary feeding and troubleshooting than any other available text. The practical detail should appeal to both health professionals and parents. Additionally, this novel approach to infant feeding is research based, as well as being based on Rapley's experiences as a health visitor. This approach to complementary feeding is both feasible, since it ties in with the developmental stages of the infant, and applicable, since it meets the government recommendation to commence complementary foods at 6 months. Indeed, government advice has started to reflect

baby-led weaning to some extent, by including self-feeding from the start of complementary feeding.

Unfortunately, the inclusion of many unfounded statements about baby-led weaning detracts from the logic of the approach. These include the assumption that the infant can meet his nutritional needs by self-selecting food, that having control over his food intake leads to less problematic eating, and that self-feeding from the start of weaning is the healthiest way for a child to develop. The inclusion of more detail on the research carried out by Rapley would be a valuable improvement to the text for health professionals, while, as the authors point out, the research study was small, necessitating further investigation. A scientific overview to baby-led weaning by Rapley can be found elsewhere⁽¹⁾.

The authors inaccurately state that infants do not require additional nutrients (i.e. from solids, rather than milk alone) until around 8 months, while research indicates that most infants require more Fe, for example, at 6 months of age. The potentially negative implication that baby-led weaning infants, due to a low intake of solids until about 8 months, may be low in certain nutrients compared with conventionally weaned infants requires investigation. Similarly, the effect on food provision and food intake due to the omission by the authors of information on infant feeding guidelines, adult dietary recommendations being highlighted to assist parents in the provision of healthier family food, requires investigation.

The authors have described a novel, feasible approach to infant feeding. The depth of information should prove interesting reading for both the parent and health professional, and should stimulate further research into infant feeding.

I have no conflict of interest to declare.

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Reference

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