

# New study highlights how little is known about baby weaning method

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(Medical Xpress)—Starting babies on solids by letting them feed themselves pieces of food is a growing trend – yet there is scarce scientific research about the practice, putting healthcare professionals in a difficult position when giving advice, new University of Otago research suggests.

University of Otago [Human Nutrition](#) PhD student Sonya Cameron's study, published today in the [British Medical Journal \(BMJ\) Open](#), interviewed a group of 20 Dunedin mothers who had followed what is known as Baby-Led Weaning (BLW) from when their babies were about six months. She also interviewed 31 health professionals involved in infant care.

She found that mothers seemed to be confidently following guidelines they had gleaned themselves either through others, literature or the internet, and that many felt intuitively that it was the best way to feed their baby. The mothers believed the advantages of introducing solid food through BLW included healthier eating [behaviours](#) and that it was a "less stressful" way to introduce solid foods.

Typically, the practice of BLW involves the infant picking up and feeding themselves pieces of soft fruit, vegetables and possibly meat, rather than the adult spoon-feeding them food that has been puréed or mashed. Ms Cameron says the practice is increasingly popular, and she had no difficulty in finding mothers practising this method of feeding in Dunedin.

However, she found that among [healthcare professionals](#) with whom mothers would typically discuss feeding issues, there was scarce information about the practice. Some health professionals also had concerns about whether it might cause problems with choking or low nutrient intakes.

"Baby-led weaning appeared to be working for these women and babies, and they felt there were distinct advantages. [Health professionals](#) also felt the practice might have advantages, such as better eating patterns, but at the same time were hesitant to recommend it largely due to the fear that babies might choke on pieces of food," she says.

While several mothers interviewed reported that their child had experienced a choking episode, none of these were serious incidents requiring intervention from parents, and it is not clear whether the infants were actually choking or gagging. Gagging is a common response when infants begin to eat any type of solid food.

"However, a number of foods that infants can pick up are definitely not suitable for them to eat. Most of the mothers in our study who reported a choking episode said it was due to raw apple.

"We would strongly recommend that hard foods like raw apple not be offered as part of Baby-Led Weaning, or any other form of infant feeding," Ms Cameron says.

The University of Otago Departments of Human Nutrition and Medicine plan further research to study a modified form of BLW using a randomised controlled trial, and are currently recruiting 300 Dunedin [mothers](#) and [babies](#) for the study.

Co-author on Ms Cameron's study, Dr Anne-Louise Heath, says this New Zealand research will address the scarcity of information

worldwide on the best way to practice Baby-Led Weaning.

Provided by University of Otago

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