

Weaning on finger foods rather than spoon-fed purees may help children stay slim

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Infants allowed to feed themselves with finger foods from the start of weaning (baby led weaning) are likely to eat more healthily and be an appropriate weight as they get older than infants spoon-fed purees, indicates a small study published in *BMJ Open*.

The findings prompt the authors to suggest that baby led weaning could help ward off obesity in later childhood.

They base their findings on 155 [children](#) between the ages of 20 months and 6.5 years, whose parents completed a detailed questionnaire about their children's weaning style and food preferences.

Ninety two of the children had been allowed to feed themselves with finger foods (baby led group) and 63 had been spoon-fed pureed foods throughout weaning.

Significant differences in preferences for the foods included in the survey were found for only one food group.

Children in the baby led group liked carbohydrates more than children who had been spoon-fed. In fact, carbohydrates were the favourite foods of children in the baby led weaning group; children in the spoon-fed group liked sweet foods the best.

This was despite the fact that along with sweet foods, children in the spoon-fed group had also been offered carbohydrates, [fruits and vegetables](#), proteins and whole meals, such as lasagne, more often than their peers in the baby led weaning group.

More children in the spoon-fed group were overweight/obese than those in the baby led group, who tended to be an appropriate weight for their height, age, and gender.

These differences were not explained by differences in birthweight, parental weight, or [socioeconomic factors](#), all of which are likely to influence a child's [body mass index](#) (BMI).

The authors suggest that carbohydrates presented whole like toast, may enhance a child's awareness of textures, which are lost when food is pureed. And they point to previous research, which shows that presentation is a key factor in food preferences.

The preference for carbohydrates among those weaned on solids could simply be that they are easier to chew than other solids, such as meat, say the authors, who point out that few children in the baby led group choked on their food. "Our study suggests that baby-led weaning has a positive impact on the liking for foods that form the building blocks of healthy nutrition, such as carbohydrates," conclude the authors.

"This has implications for combating the well documented rise of [obesity](#) in contemporary societies," they add.

Provided by British Medical Journal

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