

The Nursing Mother's Guide to Weaning

Book written by Kathleen Huggins & Linda Ziedrich

I had chosen this book for review not because I have any intention of weaning my 8.5 months old daughter, but rather, more for information.

The authors advocate weaning to be take place as late as possible, when the child is both emotionally and physically ready, and if weaning is to happen, should be done gently and with love.

The book starts with an insight into the historical background on breastfeeding and weaning practices in the West from the sixteenth century until today. It was interesting to note that women in the sixteenth and seventeenth century do not breastfeed for long and tend to wean earlier than the recommended period of 2 years. This is due to several cultural restrictions placed on breastfeeding such as: A woman was not supposed to nurse when pregnant or menstruating; abstinence from sex through the nursing period; she was not supposed to co-sleep with her baby. Wealthy women in those days also preferred wet nursing as compared to nursing their own children. If weaning is to take place, abrupt methods are usually adopted, such as removing the child from the wet nurse's home or sending the wet nurse away; or applying some vile substance on the nipples to discourage nursing. I was surprised that such practice of early weaning was the norm in the olden days as I had thought that early weaning was the result of the modern era where women earn their own keep and are more independent.

As a guide to weaning, the authors have taken the approach of looking at the weaning issues at different stage for a baby's life: From birth to 4 months old; 4 to 12 months old; 1 or 2 year old, and beyond 3 years old. The book ends with a chapter on life after weaning. For each different stage, the authors examine the possible difficulties faced by nursing mothers and reasons why a nursing mother would choose to wean. For example, for a baby before 4 months old, sore nipples, milk supply, plugged ducts, returning to work are the common problems, whereas for an older baby, distractibility, nursing strikes, teething and biting, another pregnancy could be the reasons when a nursing mother would want to wean. For every possible problem, the authors offer advice on how to overcome that problem so that breastfeeding can continue. However, for the mother who have decided to wean, the book also offers advice on weaning, ranging from choosing and preparing formula, how to wean to a bottle.

I like this book for several reasons. Firstly, the authors do not talk about weaning on a general basis, but rather look at it from each different stage of a baby's life and focus on that stage's challenges. Secondly, I like it that the authors attempt to dissuade the mother from weaning by offering advice on how to deal with each challenge faced by the mother, and yet, still offer advice weaning should the mother eventually still decide to wean.

I would recommend this book to mothers who have the intention of weaning their child early, as they might find solutions to their problems, and thus possibly avoiding premature weaning.