

## RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# Complementary Feeding Approach and Maternal Communicative Functions During Mealtimes in 12-Month-Old Infants

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## ABSTRACT

The literature on alternative approaches to complementary feeding, especially Baby-Led Weaning (a complementary feeding approach in which infants participate in family meals and eat finger food independently), has gradually increased in recent years. The present study aims to investigate whether there is a relation between the complementary feeding approach chosen by parents (Baby-Led Weaning or Parent-Led Weaning, in which infants are fed puréed food on a spoon) and maternal communicative functions produced during a typical meal. We analyzed the transcripts of mother-infant interactions occurring during mealtimes of 136 12-month-old typically developing infants, by means of a validated coding scheme that allows to identify five different communicative functions (Tutorial, Didactic, Conversational, Control and Asynchronous). The results highlighted a slightly different pattern of communicative style depending on the feeding method adopted by the parents (BLW vs. PLW). In particular, mothers of infants exposed to the PLW approach used the Tutorial function more often than mothers of infants exposed to the BLW method. The two groups did not differ in their use of the other functions. The implications for the promotion of healthy eating behaviors within family interactive contexts are discussed.

## 1 | Introduction

In Western countries, infants are usually introduced to solid foods by parents feeding them specifically prepared puréed food on a spoon (Parent-Led-Weaning, PLW; Cameron et al. 2013); however, alternative approaches, known as Baby-Led Weaning (BLW; Rapley and Murkett 2008) or On-demand complementary feeding (*Alimentazione Complementare a Richiesta*, ACR; Piermarini 2008) have recently emerged. Children exposed to these approaches participate - from the onset of the complementary feeding period (around 6 months of age; World Health Organization 2023)—in family meals and independently eat

textured foods proposed by their parents (Brown and Lee 2011) or actively requested by the children themselves (Piermarini 2008). According to the current literature, these alternative feeding methods have positive relations with child development in several domains. The BLW approach shows positive associations with better self-regulation of food intake (Rowan and Harris 2012), increased participation in family meals (Brown and Lee 2011), and advantages in language (Webber et al. 2021; Farrow et al. 2025; Pecora et al. 2025) and motor development (Addressi et al. 2021; Campeau et al. 2021). Moreover, mothers of 8- to 24-month-old infants who were more often allowed to eat autonomously (a characterizing feature of BLW) were observed

Alice Di Prete was a student at the time of conducting the research described in this paper. Specifically, a PhD student.

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