

Helping Your Breastfed Baby Accept a Bottle

Every baby is unique – not every breastfed baby will take a bottle. Some breastfed babies are more willing to accept a bottle than others. If you would like to introduce a bottle, consider offering it after breastfeeding has been going well, which is often by 4-6 weeks. It is important to continue to watch and interact with your baby while bottle feeding. The early introduction of a bottle may impact milk supply. To maintain your milk supply, hand express and/or pump when you are replacing a breastfeed with a bottle.

Strategies to Try

- **Have someone other than the nursing parent offer the bottle.** Some babies will accept a bottle if the nursing parent is out of the room and the bottle is given by someone else. Sometimes babies will take the bottle better for the nursing parent. You can experiment and see what your baby prefers.
- **Offer the bottle before baby is too hungry.** A calm baby will accept something new more easily than a hungry baby.
- **Try different feeding positions.** Some babies won't take a bottle if they are in their usual feeding position. Many babies like to be cuddled with eye contact, some babies like feeding in motion: walking, swaying or rocking. When first introducing a bottle, some older babies even prefer to be facing away from you.
- **Put a few drops of expressed breastmilk or formula (if using) on the bottle nipple.** When your baby tastes the milk, they may start sucking.
- **Try different temperatures.** Try warming the nipple by running warm water over it or dip the nipple in expressed breast milk before offering to baby. If baby is teething, try a chilled nipple from the fridge.
- **Bottle nipples come in different shapes and sizes.** Some babies will refuse a bottle because the flow of milk is too slow, and others refuse because the flow is too fast. You will need to find what your baby likes. It may take trying different bottles and nipples to find the one your baby will accept. Trying a slow flow nipple is a good place to start.
- **Use paced bottle feeding strategies.** Feed the bottle with baby in an upright position, keeping the bottle level. Tap baby's lips with the bottle nipple and wait until baby opens their mouth to draw the nipple in. Watch for cues that baby is managing the flow of milk.
- **Never prop the bottle.** Even if your baby becomes skilled and comfortable with a bottle, your baby could choke and need your attention.
- **Be patient and allow your baby time to learn how to bottle feed.** Sucking from a bottle is very different than breastfeeding. The breast and nipple feel soft while bottle nipples feel firm. Often babies will explore the nipple and bottle first before they begin drinking from it. If your baby becomes upset, stop and try again another time.

Some babies switch back and forth from breast to bottle without difficulty. Others drink small amounts from the bottle and wait for the nursing parent to return from a short separation. Once the nursing parent is available, some babies feed more often from the breast. Even if your baby continues to refuse all bottles, try not to feel too discouraged. Cup or spoon feeding are other ways for your baby to drink. For a longer separation from baby or if you need support, talk to a health care provider about other options.

References

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