

Information for breastfeeding families

Helping a Breastfed Baby Accept a Bottle



Occasionally an older breastfeeding baby will refuse to accept milk from a bottle nipple when it is needed. This can be especially disconcerting if the mother works outside the home, or needs to be away for more than the interval between feedings. Try these suggestions!

Don't wait too long

Sometime between 4-6 weeks is a good time to introduce a bottle. Sooner may interfere with the establishment of good breastfeeding. Waiting too long may result in a baby who refuses the bottle.

Have someone else give the bottle

Many nursing babies won't take a bottle from their mother. The baby can smell her and knows that there is something better at hand. Have someone else give the bottle and the mother may have to leave the room, or even leave the house.

Sometimes an experienced grandmother or day care provider will have success transitioning the baby to the bottle when the parents have been unsuccessful.

Try different holding positions

Some babies take a bottle better cuddled in the nursing position. Others do better in a totally different position. Try propping the baby in your lap with his back to your chest. The baby will see the room while drinking the bottle (don't forget eye contact later); or prop the baby on your slanted forelegs, like in an infant seat, and give the bottle while looking at him.

Give lots of lap time

Using a bottle should not reduce the amount of time that the baby gets being held, cuddled and loved.

Allow the baby time to adjust

Gently stimulate the baby's mouth with the nipple and allow the baby time to become familiar with it.

Try letting the baby play with it like a toy at other times besides at feedings. Let the baby get familiar with it on his own terms!

Try motion

Sit in a rocking chair or gently sway back and forth. Try bouncing on an exercise ball to distract your baby while offering the bottle.

Try different fluids in the bottle

Some babies prefer breastmilk in the bottle. Some prefer that the bottle contain something other than breastmilk. Sometimes $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ will work.

Try different times

Anticipate feeding times and try when the baby is happy and not too hungry. Or try when the baby is hungry and might be willing to accept anything. Try putting the bottle in the baby's mouth when he is drowsy or sleeping.

Warm it up or cool it down

Try warming the fluid in the bottle and warm the nipple to body temperature. A warm nipple feels similar to the warm breast. Or put it in the refrigerator to chill it down (teething babies like this).

Try different nipples

Features to look for in bottle nipples

- Size of the base (wide, medium or narrow)
- Length of the shank (short, medium, long)
- Transition from nipple to base is smooth not abrupt
- Flow rate (slow or newborn, medium, rapid)



Wide base

Medium base

Narrow base

Try medium base, long shank nipple with a slow flow and gentle slope from tip to base for an average size newborn. For an older or larger baby try a wide base nipple with a slow flow. They are usually the best for going back and forth from breast to bottle. Try a variety of nipple shapes and materials. Remember get the baby's jaws over the base of the medium or wide base nipple. This is similar to the positioning on the nipple and areola. The baby should be able to go back and forth from breast to bottle more easily when the bottle nipple is used properly. Refer to the handout on Paced Bottle Feeding.

If the flow seems too slow and the baby becomes frustrated, you can fill the nipple with more milk or purchase nipples rated for a faster flow. If the flow is too fast, the baby will have a panicked look on his face, cough and sputter, and milk may leak from his lips. Obtain a slower flow nipple. Ideally the bottle feeding will take the same amount of time as a typical breastfeeding. That may be 10 – 30 minutes depending on the age of the baby.

Some babies will only take a bottle which is LEAST like breastfeeding. An unusual shape and feel may be just the trick for reluctant babies. Remember to be flexible and patient.

Offer a cup

You can skip the bottle and go directly to a cup. Even preemie babies have successfully used a cup, so any baby can learn this. Use a small cup, shot glass, egg cup, medicine cup, spoon or anything similar. There are specially made feeders if you can't find a suitable item around the house. Many manufacturers make feeding cups and spoons. Explore what is on the market and follow the manufacturer's directions.

When offering cups to infants, allow the baby to pace the feeding. Do not pour milk into the baby's mouth! Place the cup on the baby's lip with the fluid just at the rim of the cup. The baby's tongue will come forward and sip or lap the milk.

Try a mirror image

Sit your baby so he can see himself in a mirror and offer the bottle. Suck on a bottle yourself or have an older sibling suck on a bottle. Your baby may want to imitate others.



Keep trying a variety of strategies, eventually something will work!

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