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“Stopping the Bottle”

www.kidshealth.org

It's very common for young toddlers to get attached to their bottles. They tend to have bottles with them much of the time, so a bottle means more than just nourishment — it becomes a source of comfort and security.

But it's important for parents to start weaning babies from bottles around the end of the first year and start getting them comfortable drinking from cups. The longer parents wait to start the transition, the more attached kids become to their bottles and the more difficult it can become to break the bottle habit.

Switching from bottle to cup can be challenging, but there are some simple ways to make this change easier for parents and kids.

Timing the Transition

Most doctors recommend introducing a cup around the time a baby is 6 months old. In the beginning, much of what you serve in a cup will end up on the floor or on your baby. But by 12 months of age, most infants have developed the coordination and manual dexterity to hold a cup and drink from it well.

Age 1 is also when doctors recommend switching from formula to cow's milk, so it can be a natural transition to offer milk in a cup rather than a bottle. If you are still breastfeeding, you may want to continue, but avoid the bottle habit altogether by offering milk, diluted juice, or water in a cup.

Tips to Try

Instead of cutting out bottles all at once, try gradually eliminating bottles from the feeding schedule, starting at mealtimes.

If your baby typically drinks three bottles each day, for example, start by eliminating the morning bottle. Instead of giving the baby a bottle right away, bring the baby to the table and after the feeding has started, offer milk from a cup. You might need to offer some encouragement and explanation, saying something like "you're a big boy now and can use a cup like mommy."

As you try to eliminate the morning bottle, keep offering the afternoon and evening bottles for about a week. That way, if your child asks for the bottle you can provide assurance that one is coming later.

The next week, eliminate another bottle feeding and provide milk in a cup instead, preferably when your baby is sitting at the table in a high chair.

Generally, the last bottle to eliminate should be the nighttime bottle. That bottle tends to be a part of the bedtime routine and is the one that most provides comfort to babies. Instead of the bottle, try offering a cup of milk with your child's evening snack and continue with the rest of your nighttime tasks, like a bath, bedtime story, or teeth brushing. It may help to give your child a comforting object to cuddle with, like a blanket or a favorite toy.

Here are some other strategies to keep in mind:

- Spill-proof cups that have spouts designed just for babies (often referred to as "sippy cups") can help ease the transition from the bottle or breast.
- When your child does use the cup, offer plenty of praise and positive reinforcement. If grandma is around, for example, you might say, "See, Emma is such a big girl she drinks milk in a cup!"
- If you keep getting asked for a bottle, find out what your child really needs or wants and offer that instead. If your child is thirsty or hungry, provide nourishment in a cup or on a plate. If it's comfort, offer hugs, and if your child is bored, sit down and play!
- As you're weaning your baby from the bottle, try diluting the milk in the bottle with water. For the first few days, fill half of it with water and half of it with milk. Then gradually add more water until the entire bottle is water. By that time, it's likely that your child will lose interest and be asking for the yummy milk that comes in a cup!
- Get rid of the bottles or put them out of sight.