

Information for breastfeeding families

Helping a Breastfed Baby Accept a Bottle



Occasionally a baby who is being breastfed will refuse to accept a bottle nipple. 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 house.

This refusal may extend to the other parent too. An experienced 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.

Try motion

Sit in a rocking chair or gently sway back and forth.

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.

Warm it up or cool it down

Try warming the breastmilk. Other babies may prefer room temperature. Or put the bottle in the refrigerator to chill it down (teething babies like this).

Try different nipples

Try a wide base nipple with a slow flow. They are usually the best for going back and forth from breast to bottle. Give a variety of nipple shapes and materials a try. And be sure to 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 nipple is used properly.

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, medicine cup, spoon or anything similar.

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 lip with the fluid just at the rim of the cup. The baby's tongue will come forward and sip or lap the milk.

