

FAQ-BOTTLE REFUSAL

As you can imagine, gently putting an end to bottle refusal is not always an easy task. Of course, in a perfect world, we wouldn't ever have to worry about trying to persuade our breastfed babies to take a bottle, but unfortunately, many mothers are forced to return to work a short while after giving birth. A baby refusing bottle can be an absolute nightmare to deal with, adding more stress to a time that may already be upsetting.



Starting tips:

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.

Step One: Choosing a bottle

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), Flow rate (slow or newborn, medium, rapid),



Wide base



Medium base



Narrow base

Try medium base, long shank nipple with a slow flow first. They are usually the best for going back and forth from breast to bottle. But 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 easier when the nipple is used properly.

If the flow seems to slow and the baby becomes frustrated, try purchasing 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.

Step Two: Timing Is Everything

It is really important to pick the right time to practice with bottles. You want to be gently and positively encouraging without being forceful or stressing the baby out. After all, the goal is to get them to take milk from a bottle happily – any aggravation is only going to make that harder, and upset both of you. Pick a time when baby is not too hungry or full, and not tired or grumpy. 30-60 minutes after a breastfeed is a good time, or perhaps a short while after a meal if your baby is eating solid foods. If baby becomes stressed, stop immediately and try again another time. Nothing encourages bottle refusal more than pushing the issue.

If your baby happily chews on the teat, allow them to do so. They may start sucking. Once they are comfortable with the bottle, you can try offering it at a time when you know they will be hungry to see if they will drink properly from it.

The amount you practice with bottles really depends on how desperate you are for baby to take them (and of course, how comfortable your baby is with it). If your return to work is imminent and you simply must get your baby accepting a bottle very soon, then you'll want to practice often. Start practicing as soon as you can so you can take your time a little with it. The key is to get the baby familiar enough with a bottle so that they happily accept it as an alternate food source.

Step Three: Mom or Dad?

You may well find that if you try to offer the bottle, you will get nowhere. Bottle refusal often magically fixes itself if dad, or another caregiver, gives the baby the bottle. Remember too that your baby can smell you from quite a long distance, so you may have to leave the house altogether in order for them to accept that they can't get the breastmilk from the source!

Step Four: Pick Your Position

Holding your baby in the traditional reclining position to give them a bottle may not work out for a breastfed baby. If mom is the one giving the bottle, it will almost certainly be too close to the real deal for them to willingly accept milk from a secondary source. If somebody else is feeding your child, the position may be too similar to a breastfeeding position. Again, try absolutely everything you can think of until you find something that works!

Here are the positions that might help:

- Traditional reclining position
- Sitting up and having them hold the bottle if they are able
- Having daddy/caregiver hold them in a breastfeeding position with the bottle tucked under their armpit
- Sitting baby in an infant seat of some description
- Giving the bottle in the bath or while walking around the house

Step Five: Relax!

Dealing with your baby refusing bottle can be really frustrating, especially since you will probably be working to a deadline. Trust me when I say that getting stressed about it will not help. Stay upbeat and positive about the whole process, because your baby will pick up on your frustration and upset very easily.

Miscellaneous Tips

Try motion- Sit in rocking chair or gently sway back and forth.

Try different fluids in the bottle - Some babies prefer breastmilk in the bottle. Some prefer that the bottle contain something other than breastmilk. Sometimes ½ and ½ will work.

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

Warm it up or cool it down- Try warming the fluid in the bottle and the warm the nipple to body temperature. Put it in the refrigerator (teething babies like this), or run warm water over it.

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 different times- Anticipate feeding times and try when the baby is 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.

OK, I've tried everything and nothing's worked. What now?

You may find, like we have, that none of the above bears any fruit and that your baby is one of those babies that will never accept a bottle instead of the breast. If this is the case, please try not to worry as there are plenty of other ways to get your milk into your child. Yes, they'll take some getting used to, but it's possible.

- Cup feeding – even very young babies can become accustomed to drinking from a cup. Use a proper cup to bring the liquid to the baby's lips, and gently tip a few drops in. It will be messy to begin with but they will soon get the hang of it, and you will avoid any risk of nipple confusion. A Doidy Cup is a great choice – they are UNICEF baby-friendly and are highly recommended for breastfed babies. You can also try some of the various sippy cups on the market.
- Syringe feeding – use an inexpensive syringe purchased from the chemist/drugstore to deposit the milk into baby's mouth.
- Finger feeding – A Supplemental Nursing System (SNS) is a tube attached to a bottle that is usually taped to the breast so that the baby can get milk from the tube whilst nursing. Instead, attach the tube to a finger and let the baby suck on your finger to get the milk.
- Reverse cycling – most babies will simply learn to wait for their milk and make up for lost time by reverse cycling – drinking more through the night. This is obviously dependent on the age of the baby, but if they are eating solid foods and are happy to drink water from other sources, they will likely learn to just wait for mama's boobs. If you are worried that they aren't getting enough of your milk, you can sneak extra in by preparing some foods with expressed milk (if your baby is eating rice cereal or oatmeal, prepare it with breast milk)!

