

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 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 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 enlarging the holes in the nipple with a hot needle or 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.

An alternative bottle is the Adiri. It's unusual shape and feel may be just the trick for some babies.

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 than feeding times. Let the baby get familiar with it on his own terms!

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 $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ 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.

Offer a cup

Skip the bottle and go 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, soft plastic bowl, medicine cup, spoon or anything similar. There are especially 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 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 variety of strategies. Eventually something will work!

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