

Paced Bottle Feeding

If you feed your baby from a bottle, you may find these suggestions helpful.

Slow flow vs. fast flow nipples:

- Use a truly **slow flow** nipple and offer the bottle in a “paced” fashion (see information below). Not all nipples advertised as “slow flow” are slow. An ideal nipple requires a baby to suck to remove milk. This discourages a baby from “chomping” or “chewing” on the bottle nipple or the breast.
- **Fast flow nipples** (and some advertised “slow flow” nipples) may cause a baby to lift the back of their tongue to slow the flow down. If a baby lifts the back of their tongue while breastfeeding, they may end up pushing the breast out of their mouth. **When you “pace” a bottle feeding**, you can help prevent this. A baby can also get used to a fast flow nipple and become upset by a slower flow at the breast.

Standard vs. wide base nipples:

- **Avoid a short, stubby nipple with a very wide base.** When babies breastfeed, they take a lot of breast in their mouth. A standard width nipple is often preferable because most babies can get their mouth completely around the nipple base. A “wide mouth” nipple, which may be advertised as “more like mother’s breast,” is often too large for a baby’s mouth and a baby will then latch only to the narrow part of the nipple.

Holding a baby during a bottle feeding:

- **When holding your baby for a bottle feeding, think about how a baby is held at the breast.** Babies are generally in a side lying position facing the breast, or upright with their head higher than their body. This allows a baby to control the milk flow and pool milk in the side of their mouth if the flow is too fast. Your baby’s head should be aligned with their upper body and should not be extended back or bent forwards (towards their chin).

How to start a bottle feeding:

- **You may find it helpful to start a bottle feeding** by laying (touching) the bottle nipple over your baby’s lips or under their nose, with the tip of the nipple pointing at their nose. When your baby opens wide, gently and slowly insert the nipple so that your baby’s lips flange out (or cover) the wider part of the nipple. You should be able to see the pink of your baby’s lips. This is also how a baby’s lips are positioned at the breast.

How to “pace” a feeding:

- **If your baby is used to an immediate reward of milk flow with a bottle feeding**, you may want to angle the bottle so there is no milk in the bottle nipple for the first 30 seconds that your baby is sucking. Then tip the bottle so the nipple fills only halfway (**see drawing below**). This will help your baby get used to a slower let down and a slower flow and encourage them to “pace” the feeding, rather than react to a faster flow by guarding with their tongue. For a video of paced bottle feeding, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGPm5SpLxXY>

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When a faster flow bottle or a finger feeding may be helpful:

- **If your baby is very sleepy and weight gain is important**, you may find that your baby needs a lot of encouragement to bottle feed. You may **temporarily** need a faster flow bottle, but it is important that your baby is not overwhelmed by the flow and chokes or spits milk out while feeding. It is normal for a bottle feeding to take 10 to 20 minutes with a young baby. If your baby is very sleepy, you may find it easier to finger feed your baby temporarily.

When your baby refuses to take a bottle:

- **If your baby is older than one month of age and has never had a bottle**, it may be difficult to get your baby to accept a bottle. It may be easier for someone other than the breastfeeding parent to offer the bottle, and it may take a LOT of patience on the part of the person offering the bottle. Make sure they understand this is a new experience for your baby and it may take your baby a while to learn how to bottle feed and accept the bottle. See our information on ***Bottle Refusal***.

Older babies and bottles and cups:

- **A baby who is older than four months of age** may do better going straight to a cup with a soft or firm spout, rather than trying to learn how to take a bottle.

There are many reasons why a mother may feed her baby a bottle of her pumped milk. For flexibility, it is ideal if a mother can choose whether to feed her baby at her breast OR with a bottle. According to the American Dental Academy, research shows that babies who are breastfed are less likely to have teeth alignment issues. In addition, babies benefit from the *process* of being at the breast, just as they benefit from the nutrition and protective factors of human milk. However, sometimes feeding a baby at the breast is not an option.



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