

Bottle Feeding A Breastfed Baby

The decision to introduce a bottle can be a tough one for breastfeeding families. Whether mom is returning to work, baby isn't latching, or the family wants to share the feeding duties (for instance at night) there can be hesitation, and even fear, that arises when thinking about it. That is totally normal, and understandable! There are other ways to feed your baby that don't include a bottle such as an SNS, Lactaid, finger feeder, cup, and curved tip syringe, so if you are worried that it may not be a good time for a bottle, or are simply curious, I'd be happy to talk to you about all your options. If you do choose to try a bottle here are some great tips to making it a smooth transition for your family!

Best,

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How to pick a bottle for the breastfed baby.

There isn't really a "right" bottle as far as bottle shape is concerned, it all depends on the baby and caregiver's comfort during the feed. Some babies will take any bottle offered to them, and some babies have to try numerous bottles to find one they're willing to take. Some families find that their baby will have an easier time taking a bottle that has a similar nipple and bottle shape to their mom's breast. The standard nipple shape works well for babies with high palates, and shorter bottle nipples works well for babies with sensitive gag reflexes. Babies who are refusing bottles do well with shorter, more flexible bottle nipples because they're most like the breast.

The flow rate of the nipple is an important factor to consider. Some families are most comfortable using the slowest flow rate they can find, while some families struggle because their baby refuses slow flow nipples because they're used to a quick and/or strong let down. Starting with the slowest flow is a good idea, but if baby is used to a fast flow (and they won't eat from a slow flow nipple) try going to the next nipple flow rate up. Another consideration when selecting bottles is what style to get. There are bottles that have venting systems that can help preserve nutritional content, some that have a rounded shape to mimic a breast, and some that look like the classic bottle that has been so widely used for decades. This decision is up to the family and what they are comfortable with financially. Just like with there isn't a right or wrong bottle shape, there are no right or wrong bottle gimmicks. The most important things about choosing a bottle are picking an appropriate flow rate, and whether or not baby will take it. The rest is just personal preference.

The final piece to introducing a bottle is the actual feeding itself! Many people are not familiar with paced bottle feeding, but it is a more natural way for a baby to eat than the conventional way most people have been taught to feed a baby. It mimics breastfeeding, so it can be an easier transition between bottle and breast for a baby who is fed both ways. Even with a baby who is fed exclusively with a bottle it is a fantastic method because it allows the baby to control the amount they are eating.

How to pace bottle feed.

Step 1: Get comfortable! One drawback of this method is that it takes longer than traditional bottle feeding, so make sure that you are well supported in a comfortable chair with a bottle that is ergonomically comfortable. The baby should be in an upright position. This is different than what most people do when they feed a baby a bottle, but it is actually a much better way to feed a baby because when the baby is in a horizontal position they don't have very good control of the flow of milk. Another reason upright is better is because their brains are wired to feel more secure and organized (very important to feeding well!) when they are not on their backs.

Step 2: The bottle should be held in a horizontal position with milk only filling about half the nipple. This is also different than what most people are used to, but by using this position the baby gains more control over the flow of milk as well as it makes it a little bit harder for them which is good for their muscle development in their mouths and their expectations when they get back to the breast. Some moms worry about the air in the nipple, and that is actually an old wives' tale. Just like adults, babies will breathe the excess air out of their nostrils when they're eating. By keeping the milk flow in their control rather than letting gravity dump it into them they are able to coordinate their suck, swallow, and breathe patterns just like they do while breastfeeding! Of course, if your baby does swallow a little air burping them should clear it right up.

Step 3: When you offer the bottle to the baby start by gently tickling their lips and philtrum (the divot above the lip) with the bottle's nipple just like mom would with her nipple to elicit a wide gape. When baby is ready to nurse they'll latch onto the bottle nipple, no need to try to force it in their mouth.

Step 4: During the feeding you can remove the bottle from the baby's mouth and rest it on their philtrum to help them get a little rest while eating. Another way of achieving this slowed down process is to leave the bottle in the baby's mouth, but lower the bottle so that the milk drains from the nipple. When the baby is ready to resume eating they'll start sucking again, or relatch depending on the method you use. Eventually your baby may not resume eating even if there is milk left in the bottle. This is okay, if they're done, they're done, and there is no need to force them to finish the bottle. Other satiety cues are relaxed hands, turning from the bottle, spitting out the nipple, or falling asleep after a good feeding.

Step 5: Share this information with everyone who will be feeding your baby! If you'd like to see paced bottle feeding in action here is a link to a good video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UH4T70OSzGs>.