



## Supporting your child to stop using bottles and dummies

**Babies and children can become attached to bottles or to their dummies and they may be used for comfort and security. Using bottles or dummies for too long can lead to problems in the following areas for children: teeth problems, ear infections, tummy and respiratory infections, thrush in the mouth and a delay in their speaking.**

In this resource, we are going to think about why it is important to stop using a bottle or dummy when your baby is old enough, when and why it is recommended you stop using bottles and dummies, and finally, we will share some top tips for doing this. We will also cover using a dummy if you are breast or chest feeding.

- Baby teeth are really important for chewing, speaking, and smiling, so we need to look after them. As soon as you see your baby's first tooth, start to brush it with a toothbrush made for young children and a small smear of fluoride toothpaste. For a video on how to brush your child's teeth, see: <https://bit.ly/339yMle>. Looking after your child's first teeth can really help to give them strong healthy teeth.
- Comfort sucking on sweetened drinks is the biggest cause of tooth decay in young children. If you use a bottle or trainer cup, don't put anything in it other than breast or chest milk, infant formula or water.

### Did you know?

That fruit juice, cow's milk, and infant formula milk all contain sugar, and can harm teeth when given in a bottle.

**More information on Page 2**

**For additional Parent Tips see [www.ihv.org.uk](http://www.ihv.org.uk)**

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- Sugary drinks at nap-time or night-time are more likely to damage teeth. Less saliva is made whilst we sleep and saliva protects teeth from acid. Teeth should be cleaned after drinking milk before bed.
- Sugar can harm teeth and lead to tooth decay. It is not just about the amount of sugar in drinks and food but how often and for how long your baby's teeth are in contact with the sugar. Tooth decay can be painful and cause infection. Sometimes, the tooth has to be removed and we know that most hospital admissions for tooth decay in children under 5 could be prevented by looking after teeth and limiting the amount of sugar that their teeth are in contact with.

## When to stop using bottles

- From the age of 12 months, if your baby drinks infant formula rather than breast or chest milk, most babies can switch to cow's milk.
- You can introduce water in a free flow cup without a valve or a beaker from 6 months onwards at mealtimes when you start introducing solid foods.
- If you're breast or chestfeeding, you can continue to do this and offer water from a cup/beaker when you start introducing solid food from 6 months onwards.
- Many parents worry that when they take the bottle away, their baby's milk intake reduces.
- The recommended amount of daily calcium for a 1-3 year old is 350mg. For example, 100ml of cow's milk contains 120mg and, if your baby is eating other foods rich in calcium such as cheese or yoghurt, it is the combination of what they are drinking and eating that matters.

- If your baby is drinking too much milk, it will fill their tummy, making them less hungry for solid food. It can cause obesity and may also affect their ability to absorb iron from foods.

## Reminder about vitamins for children

- Breast or chest fed babies need their own supplement of vitamin D daily. The parent who is breast or chest feeding also needs a daily vitamin D supplement. Further information can be found in **iHV Parent Tips - Vitamins for Children**, available: <https://bit.ly/35vrRU8> and on the NHS website: <https://bit.ly/3Nzr2KV>.
- Babies who are having more than one pint of infant formula a day (500ml) do not require vitamin supplements as infant formula has vitamins A, C and D added, and overdosing with these vitamins is dangerous. When your baby drinks less than one pint or 500ml of infant formula each day, then they need daily vitamin supplements.

## Top tips to help your child stop using a bottle

- Start to introduce your baby to a cup from about six months onwards at mealtimes.
- Choosing an open cup or a free-flow cup with a lid and without a valve will help your baby learn to sip rather than suck, this is better for their teeth.
- As soon as your baby is ready, encourage them to move from a cup with a lid to drinking from a cup.  
If you don't want to stop feeding from bottles suddenly, try reducing them gradually starting at mealtimes.
- Aim to stop using bottles and teats by your baby's first birthday. By 12 months of age, most babies have the coordination and ability to hold a cup or beaker and drink from it.

- If your baby usually drinks three bottles each day, choose a good time for you and your baby, perhaps when you're not in a rush or under pressure, and replace that bottle with milk in a cup. As you stop the first bottle, offer the other two bottles for about a week. That way, if your baby asks for the bottle, you can provide assurance that one is coming later. The next week, stop the second bottle, offer food first followed by some milk or water in a cup.

[More information on Page 3](#)

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- Offering a bottle at bedtime can be part of the bedtime routine and maybe the one your baby is most reluctant to give up. Instead of the bottle, try offering a cup of milk with your baby's healthy evening snack and continue with the rest of your night-time tasks, like a bath, teeth brushing and bedtime story. It might help to give your baby a comfort object, like a blanket or a soft toy, as part of the bedtime routine.
- When your baby does use the cup, offer plenty of praise and positive reinforcement.
- If you keep getting asked for a bottle, respond in a calm and positive manner, consider your baby's needs for comfort and reassurance, try to distract, and offer alternatives, e.g., playtime.
- Keep bottles out of sight and ensure that other caregivers are providing a consistent response to requests for bottles.

## When to stop using dummies

- Dummies can be useful in very young babies who like to suck as they can help to calm and soothe them and may aid sleep. They have been shown to reduce pain when having injections or other painful procedures and offer comfort or security when upset. However, they can become an unhelpful sleep association when older and increase the incidence of middle ear infections, chest infections, and thrush infections of the mouth. Dummies need to be sterilised regularly.
- The Lullaby Trust advice is that if you start using a dummy, then you should keep going until the baby is 6-months old - see Fact Sheet 7 on Dummies/Pacifiers: <https://bit.ly/3G4ajNn>
- It is worth noting that all babies cry and some can be inconsolable which is distressing for parents. Please have a look at **iHV Parent Tips: Coping with a crying baby** (available: <https://bit.ly/3wvMhWX>) for some other ideas on how to comfort them.
- Babies who use dummies a lot, or who use a dummy for long periods, may have problems as their teeth grow and develop. Overusing a dummy can also hinder speech development, which is why it's recommended that you try to limit the times your baby uses a dummy, and to stop offering a dummy by the time your child is one-year old.

## Using a dummy when breast or chestfeeding:

- If a dummy is introduced too early, there's a risk of nipple confusion for a baby learning to feed from the breast or chest. When a baby is being breast or chestfed, it is best not to give a dummy until breast or chestfeeding is well established, usually at about one-month old.
- Parents can mistakenly offer a dummy when their baby really needs a breast or chestfeed. Please speak with your health visitor if you would like some support on recognising when your baby needs a breast or chestfeed.

## Top tips to help your child stop using a dummy

Whenever you choose to stop offering your baby a dummy, you can make the transition to being dummy-free a little easier on you and your baby with these helpful tips:

- Prepare your child in advance for what you're going to do. Tell your baby/child that in three days we're going to be finished with the dummy and I know you understand this and that you can do it.
- Try limiting the time the dummy is used - perhaps only at naptime and bedtime. If necessary, give a substitute comfort object such as a small new toy or book that the child can carry around for security.
- Use distractions and be aware of the comfort need that might be behind wanting a dummy, and provide comfort in another way.
- Offer praise, reward with hugs and kisses, positive attention and playing – having fun.
- Use a star chart or stickers, this can help with older children.

[More information on Page 4](#)

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- Finally, try not to turn back. No matter how well you have prepared your child for this change, expect some discomfort and some protest.
- If you need any further support with weaning your baby off bottles or dummies, then you can seek advice from your local health visiting team.

## Further information:

- **NHS**
  - » Looking after your baby's teeth: <https://bit.ly/339yMle>
  - » What to feed young children: <https://bit.ly/3dZGxiY>
  - » Vitamins for children: <https://bit.ly/3tznAIF>
- **Scotland**
  - » NHS - Looking after your child's teeth: <https://bit.ly/3C7Ovi6>
  - » Child smile - Information on caring for your children's teeth: <https://bit.ly/3LJwPPH>
  - » NHS Lothian - Babies and dummies: <https://bit.ly/3V7y0et>
- **Northern Ireland**
  - » NI Direct - Drinks for babies: <https://bit.ly/3T5tCep>
- **Wales**
  - » Designed to smile: <https://bit.ly/3ecgaGO>
- **NHS Change for Life** -
  - » Healthier Families Food Swaps: <https://bit.ly/3JdwrVA>
  - » Life Sugar Calculator: <https://bit.ly/3wgJSAw>
- **NHS Better Health, Healthier Families** - Download the free NHS Food Scanner: <https://bit.ly/3KX0bl6>
- **iHV Parent Tips** - Coping with a crying baby: <https://bit.ly/3wvMhWX>
- **Healthy Start** - help to buy healthy food and milk in England: <http://bit.ly/2ksm9LO>
- **Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods** - help to buy healthy food and milk in Scotland: <https://bit.ly/3aGLIPy>

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