

# When your Breastfeeding Baby Refuses the Bottle



Many babies will move happily between breastfeeding and bottle-feeding, whereas some babies show their strong preference for breastfeeding by refusing the bottle when offered.

If you are a mother who is not returning to work or another situation where you will be regularly separated from your baby, then you can probably work out occasional short separations so that your baby doesn't miss a breastfeeding. However, if you are returning to work or school then you will want to feel confident that your baby will accept a bottle when you are away. It may take some patience and willingness to experiment to see what will work for *your* baby. Here are some ideas to consider:

- Have your partner or another caregiver offer the bottle when you, the breastfeeding mother, are not around - preferably not even in the home. If your baby knows you are there, then he is might try to hold out, expecting to be able to breastfeed.
- Always *offer* the bottle, never pushing the bottle nipple into your baby's mouth. Try tickling his lips first to see if he will open his mouth, and then gently insert the bottle nipple.
- Offer the bottle when your baby is not too hungry and allow her to playfully explore it with her mouth (without needing to make it a meal). Hungry babies may not be interested in trying something new - they want food the way they've always gotten food and they want it NOW. If she is open to putting any amount of the bottle nipple in her mouth, even if she doesn't drink much or any at all, offer lots of verbal praise. Consider this a (partial) success, and try again another time.
- Offer the bottle while the caregiver moves rhythmically: by walking, rocking, gently bouncing, or swaying.
- Some babies who are resistant to the bottle do better when bottle-feeding as close to breastfeeding as possible: warm the bottle nipple (even smearing some breastmilk on it) and cradle baby facing the caregiver who has the bottle tucked under his/her armpit. For other babies, it is just the opposite. They are less offended by the bottle if it is treated completely differently from breastfeeding: face baby away from caregiver, positioned upright (see photo left).
- You can also try the bottle while baby is sleeping. Babies tend to be more instinctive – and less resistant – when they are sleeping. If this works, it may be a step towards transitioning to bottle-feeding when baby is awake.



- The best bottle nipple is the one that works best for your baby. That said, certain bottle nipples result in a latch that is most like breastfeeding. These bottle nipples are the narrow widths that gradually widen (which are **not** generally the ones which are marketed to be most like breastfeeding). With this type of bottle nipple, your baby can latch onto the widest part of the nipple, getting close or all the way to the collar. Dr. Brown's standard width preemie or level 1 bottles are currently the most recommended bottle for mimicking a breastfeeding latch.

Wide gape around bottle nipple, most like breastfeeding.  
Baby's mouth is all the way to the collar.

Photo courtesy of  
Ana Estorino Uribeasterra, IBCLC  
Inving Start Lactation Services



A bottle nipple shape that results in a latch closest to breastfeeding.



However, if you have a baby who breastfeeds very well and doesn't want to be fooled by a bottle that mimics breastfeeding, you may actually want to try a very different type of bottle – a bottle that results in a very different experience than breastfeeding. The MAM bottle has worked well for some of these nursing babies who resist the bottle.

- Maybe the answer to a baby refusing the bottle is to not use a bottle! Even very young babies can be fed from a cup, although there is usually a significant amount of spilling. The Doidy cup can work well for early transition to cup-feeding.

### When to introduce the bottle

If your baby is refusing to bottle-feed, you may be wondering: *Did I wait too long to introduce the bottle?*

The answer is probably "No!" Introducing a bottle sooner versus later is not likely to impact the chance a baby will be one of those who resists or refuses the bottle. Whether the bottle is introduced at 1 month, 2 months, or 3-6 months, about 30% of babies will refuse or resist the bottle (Kearney & Cronenwett, 1991). These (dare we say, stubborn) babies simply know what the good stuff is!

The best time to introduce a bottle is when breastfeeding is well established, usually between 3 and 6 weeks old.

Kearney, M.H. & Cronenwett, L. (1991). Breastfeeding and employment. *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic, and Neonatal Nursing*, 20(6), 471-480.

**Getting your baby to accept the bottle may be a gradual process. It is likely to involve some trial-and-error. The key is to make it a positive, playful experience for your baby!**