

Any parent who has witnessed the love affair between baby and bottle knows security is a bottle's main appeal. But most pediatricians recommend that parents start weaning their child off the bottle at around 12 months, for a host of reason. The two major ones are:

1. Prolonged bottle drinking can damage baby teeth. Mobile toddlers tend to tote their bottles around, drinking on the go, as opposed to infants, who are usually fed in a parent's arms; the bottle is removed as soon as the feeding session is over. If the bottle contains anything other than water, what you have is an acidic solution that is washing over the teeth and decalcifying them, which can lead to cavities.



2. Bottle drinkers tend to ingest more milk--typically up to 32 ounces a day. Toddlers only need two to three servings of dairy a day, equivalent to 16 to 24 ounces of milk. While milk is a healthy food, kids who drink too much of it may not want to eat enough solid food, missing out on important nutrients like iron.

By the time they're a year old, kids have the motor skills to sit up, hold a cup, and drink from it, do that they no longer need a bottle, at least not for nutrition. One-year-olds are much less stubborn, have a shorter memory, and are more interested in pleasing their parents than a child just six months older. But, if you've missed this window and your toddler is strongly attached to his bottle, don't despair. You can get him off of it. **Here are some strategies to try.**

#### Before the Big Switch

By the time babies are between 9 and 12 months old, they're often ready to make the switch from bottle to cup. At this age, they're more interested in what's going on around them than they are in sucking on a breast or bottle. However, phasing out the bottle this early means planning ahead. Here are some tips:

- \* Starting at 6 months, let kids occasionally drink from a sippy cup, so when you eventually do get rid of the bottle, your child will already be acquainted with the cup.
- \* Let babies get used to cup while they're in the tub. They can pour water out of it, drink from it, or even make a mess with it.
- \* Don't always offer juice in a cup and milk in a bottle. Otherwise your child may refuse to drink milk from a cup when you get him off the bottle.
- \* If you breastfeed exclusively until baby is 9 to 12 months, simply skip introducing the bottle entirely. At this age, babies have the necessary coordination to drink from a cup.

#### The Gradual Phase-Out

This moderate approach works best with young toddlers. Over a period of about a month:

- \* Decrease the bottles you offer, one at a time, and replace them with cups of milk or snacks.
- \* Water down the bottles of milk that you serve but give your child undiluted milk in a cup.
- \* Phase out the least important bottles first (usually the midday ones).

During this transition, these creative ideas may ease the process:

- \* Let your child pick out a special new cup, or decorate one that you already own.
- \* Try using a funny straw--it makes cups more appealing.

If you wean your 12 to 15 month-old gradually, chances are he'll be able to give up even the bedtime or morning bottle without a fuss.



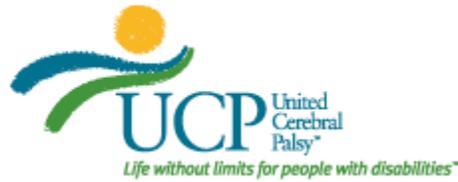
## Going Cold Turkey

For a child who is strongly attached to his bottle as a comfort object, a gradual approach may be too agonizing. And he may already be down to just one or two daily bottles. A sudden withdrawal can be painful for everyone, but it may be the most effective method. Here are some ideas to ease the process:

- \* Get your child used to the idea of no bottles before you actually phase them out. About a week before the big day, tell him that now that he's such a big boy, it's time for him to give up his bottles. Remind him every day that soon he's not going to have bottles anymore. Then physically remove the bottles from the house and let him see that they're not around.
- \* Let your child participate in the process. Explain that you understand how hard this change might be for him. One of the advantages of weaning an older child is that you can talk about what's happening and why.
- \* Offer him a reward, such as a snack that he loves, for making it through a day or night without his bottle.
- \* Have a cup of water or juice ready for the time of day when he seems to demand the bottle most.
- \* Talk with your child about replacing the bottle with a soothing object. For instance, suggest that he hug the teddy bear whenever he misses the bottle.

Getting your child off the bottle usually involves some trial and error--and sometimes tears. But here's the good news: **Once you decide on a plan and stick with it, you will get results.**

Source: American Baby



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# All About Weaning



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