

WHAT TO DO WHEN BOTTLE FEEDING IS NOT GOING WELL

Some babies take time to adjust to bottle feeding. The strategies below can help support your child if the transition is not going well. The goal is to keep all bottle-feeding experiences positive, calm, and within your baby's comfort level. However, if the bottle is your baby's only source of nutrition and they are not accepting it, it is recommended to seek medical advice. See below for more information on when to seek medical support.

Start with Low Pressure Feeding

- Gently offer the bottle and watch your baby's response
- If your baby opens their mouth or leans in, continue feeding
- If your baby turns away, pushes the bottle, or cries, take a short break
- If your baby refuses again, end the feed and try again later

Taking a break helps prevent negative feeding experiences

Avoid Force Feeding

- Do not push the bottle into your baby's mouth
- Avoid encouraging your baby to finish the bottle
- Try not to feed while your baby is crying or upset

Pressure is a common cause of issues with bottle feeding transitions

Focus on Small, Frequent Opportunities

- Offer the bottle more often rather than expecting large volumes in one sitting
- It is okay if your baby only takes small amounts at a time
- Split feeds into smaller sessions with breaks in between

Comfort and consistency are important

Watch for Signs the Flow Is Too Fast or Too Slow

- Gulping, coughing, or choking
- Milk leaking from the mouth
- Pulling away or appearing stressed
- Feeding that feels very slow, effortful, or frustrating for your baby



If these signs occur, the flow may not be right. Try a slower flow nipple if your baby seems overwhelmed or gulping. If feeding seems like hard work or your baby becomes frustrated, a slightly faster flow may help.

Use Positions That Support Control

- Try a side lying position to help your baby control the pace of feeding
 - Hold your baby on their side (preferably on their left side to reduce the risk of reflux) rather than on their back, with their head slightly higher than their body
 - Keep the bottle more horizontal so milk flows more slowly
 - This helps your baby pause, breathe, and swallow more easily and may reduce gulping, coughing, or stress
- Always keep your baby well supported and watch their cues during feeding



When to Seek Medical Support

- Consult with your pediatrician, family physician, or nurse practitioner if you are concerned your baby is not getting enough. Watch for:
 - Signs of dehydration (dry mouth, low energy, sleepiness, fewer wet diapers than usual)
 - Weight loss or poor weight gain
 - Very low intake over 24 hours

Every baby develops feeding skills at their own pace. Some will adjust quickly to bottle feeding, while others may need more time and repeated positive experiences. The goal is not perfection, but building comfort, trust, and safety around feeding. Small, consistent steps can make a meaningful difference over time.