

WHEN WEANING IS DELAYED

Most infants show a reduced interest in breast and bottle feedings between 9 and 12 months of age if they are already taking cup and spoon feedings. With a little encouragement and help, they can wean themselves at this time. Many children, however, become more attached to breast or bottle and less likely to wean themselves as they grow older. For these children, the parent often has to initiate the process. Breast or bottle feeding can be considered prolonged after about 18 months of age.

Delayed weaning should be considered a problem because it can cause one or more of the following harmful effects: a refusal to eat any solids after 6 months of age; anemia; tooth decay (baby-bottle caries); obesity from overeating; daytime withdrawal and lack of interest in play because the child is always carrying a bottle around; a frequent awakening at night for refills of a bottle; inability to stay with a baby-sitter because the child is exclusively breast-fed and refuses a bottle or cup.

Reduce milk feedings to three or four a day. When your child comes to you for additional feedings, give him extra holding and attention instead. Get your child on a schedule of three main meals per day plus two or three nutritious snacks.

Introduce cup feedings if this was not done at 6 months of age. Cup feedings are needed as substitutes for breast or bottle feedings regardless of the age at which weaning occurs. The longer the infant goes without using a cup, the less willing he will be to try it. Starting daily cup feedings by 5 or 6 months of age is a natural way to keep breast or bottle feedings from becoming overly important.

Immediately stop allowing your child to carry a bottle around during the day. The companion bottle can interfere with normal development that requires speech or two-handed play. Immediately stop allowing your child to take a bottle to bed. Besides causing sleep problems, taking a bottle to bed carries the risk of causing tooth decay ear infections. You can offer the same explanations as above.

Attempt total weaning only if your family is not under stress (such as might be caused by moving or some other major change) and your child is not in crisis (from illness or trying to achieve bladder control, for example). Weaning from breast or bottle to cup should always be done gradually and with love.

To eliminate breast feeding completely, take the following steps: Offer formula in a cup before each breast feeding. If your child refuses formula, offer expressed breast milk. If that fails, add some flavoring he likes to the formula. If your child is older than 12 months, you can use whole milk. Some infants won't accept a cup until they've nursed for several minutes.

Gradually eliminate breast feedings. First, eliminate the feeding that is least important to your child (usually the midday one). Replace it with a complete cup-feeding. About once a week drop out one more breast feeding. The bedtime nursing is usually the last to be given up, and there's no reason why you can't continue it for months if that's what you and your child want. Some mothers prefer to wean by decreasing the length of feedings. Shorten all feedings by two minutes each week until they are five minutes long. Then eliminate them one at a time.

Relieve breast engorgement. Since the breast operates on the principle of supply and demand, reduced sucking time eventually reduces milk production. In the meantime, express just enough milk to relieve breast pain resulting from engorgement. This is better than putting your baby to the breast for a minute, because she probably won't want to stop nursing. Remember that complete emptying of the breast increases milk production. An acetaminophen product also may help relieve discomfort.

If your child asks to nurse after you have finished weaning, respond by holding her instead. You can explain that "the milk is all gone." If she has a strong sucking drive, more pacifier time may help.

To eliminate bottle-feeding completely, take the following steps: Offer formula in a cup before each bottle feeding. Use whole milk if your child is 1 year of age or older. Make the weaning process gradual. Eliminate one bottle feeding every three to four days, depending on your child's reaction. Replace each bottle feeding with a cup feeding and extra holding.

Eliminate bottle feedings in the following order: midday, late afternoon, morning, and bedtime. The last feeding of the day is usually the most important one to the child. When it is time to give up this feeding, gradually reduce the amount of milk each day over the course of a week.

After you have completed the weaning process, respond to requests for a bottle by holding your child. You can explain that bottles are for little babies. You may even want to have your child help you carry the bottles to a neighbor's house. If your child has a strong need to suck, offer a pacifier. **GOOD LUCK!**