Last updated: 27 March 2026

Move from bottle to cup

Helping your child move from bottle to cup

Supporting babies to move from bottles to cups is an important step in their development. It encourages healthy drinking habits, protects their teeth, and helps them learn the skills they need for eating and drinking as they grow. Prolonged bottle use — especially when combined with sugary drinks or non-suitable cups — can contribute to dental decay in young children and increase the risk of health problems such as obesity later in life. Introducing a cup at the right time helps prevent these issues and supports independence.

When to introduce a cup

The British Dietetic Association (BDA) recommends:

- Around 5–6 months: Begin offering small amounts of water or milk (breast or formula) from a cup once your baby can sit upright and hold their head steady.
- Around 12 months: Aim for a cup to fully replace bottles.

This supports oral development and reduces the risks associated with long-term bottle feeding.

Choosing the right cup

The British Dietetic Association (BDA) guidance includes:

- Open cups made of food-safe plastic, with two handles and ideally no lid, are best for learning.
- Free-flow beakers (lidded cups without a non-drip valve) may be used temporarily, but the lid should be removed as soon as your child learns to sip.
- Avoid non-drip, valved cups, as they encourage sucking patterns similar to bottles and may affect teeth and speech.

Appropriate drinks for babies and young children

- Offer water or milk only (breastmilk, formula, or full-fat cow's milk from one year).
- Do not give juices, squash, smoothies, fizzy drinks, or sugary drinks — the sugars and acids contribute to tooth decay and encourage a preference for sweet flavours.
- Avoid tea, coffee, or hot chocolate, as they contain caffeine and are unsuitable for infants and young children

Important safety guidance

- Always supervise babies and young children when drinking.
- Ensure they are sitting upright — never let a baby drink lying down, especially in bed.
- Never put food (such as baby rice or rusk) into a bottle or cup.
- Be mindful of cleaning: spouted water bottles can hide mould in spouts or straws if not washed thoroughly.

Why cup-training matters

According to the BDA, introducing a cup at the appropriate age helps prevent:

- Bottle-related dental decay (especially if a child sleeps with a bottle)
- Excessive sipping throughout the day
- High sugar intake
- Emerging risks of obesity in young children

Good habits in the first year of life build the foundation for lifelong healthy eating and drinking patterns.

Supporting your child to learn

From around one year old, children gain better control over their hand movements. With supervision and encouragement, they can begin to drink successfully from an open cup. However, they still need help to prevent spills — consistency and patience make all the difference.

You can help by:

- Modelling drinking from open cups
- Offering open-cup practice during calm mealtimes
- Gradually reducing bottle use while increasing cup opportunities
- Keeping water available between meals to build positive hydration habits

More Information

For wider NHS guidance on suitable drinks and cups, see:

- Drinks and cups for babies and young children: https://www.nhs.uk/baby/weaning-and-feeding/drinks-and-cups-for-babies-and-young-children/

Need further support?
Visit **rafakidz.org.uk**