

Transitioning to Cup Drinking Before Cleft Palate Repair

Why does my child need to drink from a cup before cleft palate repair?

As your child gets ready for surgical repair of the palate, it is important that he or she is no longer drinking from a bottle or using a pacifier. The sucking motion and contact from the nipple may interfere with healing. Cleft palates are typically repaired between 8 and 12 months of age. Your child needs to be drinking all liquids from a free flowing cup (no bottle) for at least one month before surgery.

What is a free flowing cup?

If your child has to suck to get liquids from the cup it is not free flowing. Examples of free flowing cups are:

- An open cup
- A cut-out cup
- A sippy cup with a short spout and no spill-proof valve or straw. Examples include the Gerber or Nuby sippy cups (be sure to remove the spill proof valve).

When should my child start drinking from a cup?

It is important to introduce a free flowing cup at 6 months of age. Signs your child is ready include:

- Good head control.
- Able to sit upright in a high chair with little support.
- Starting to eat baby food and showing interest in eating.

How should I help my child transition to the cup?

Before you start this process, here are some key points to keep in mind:

- Initially, the goal is to help your child explore and learn about the cup, not to replace the bottle.
- After trying some of the cups listed above, pick one and use the same cup every day.
- Make sure that your child cannot see the bottle when you offer the cup.
- Offer the cup when your child is awake, happy, hungry and willing to try something new. Always offer the cup before the bottle.
- Start by offering ½ to 1 oz. of liquid from the cup one time per day. Gradually increase cup drinking times and amounts from there.
- As your child becomes more comfortable with cup drinking, reduce the number of bottle feedings. Usually it is easiest to start with the first feeding of the day and the bottle before bedtime is the hardest. It may be different for your child.

General Guidelines

Age	Cup Drinking Skills
6 months	• Introduce the cup and allow your child to play with it. • Show your child how to drink from a cup. • Offer your child small amounts of milk (½ to 1 oz.) one time per day while he or she is sitting in the highchair and eating baby food.
6 ½ months	• Offer your child 1 to 2 oz. of milk from the cup at least 2 to 3 times per day. • Start introducing different calming activities to help your child learn to self-soothe without the bottle or pacifier (such as a special blanket, cuddling, music).
7 months	• Your child should be taking milk from the cup at least three times per day (breakfast, lunch and dinner) – ideally enough to end the need for bottle feedings after meals. • Start to offer an additional 1 to 2 oz. of milk from the cup during snack times (2 times per day). • Continue working on new calming/self-soothing activities.
8 months	• By this time, your child is using the cup at all meal and snack times so it is time to eliminate the bedtime bottle. • Typically it is easiest to just stop offering the bottle at bed – replace the bottle with new calming activities. There may be a few tears but babies usually adjust quickly.

Key points to remember:

- ☐ Your child will be messy when he or she is learning to drink from the cup.
- ☐ Most children do the best with a familiar liquid (like formula or breast milk) from the cup.
- ☐ Make cup-drinking experiences pleasurable and fun. Do not force your child to drink from the cup. If your child is not interested, end the activity and try again later.
- ☐ This is a gradual process. It is important to start early and give your child time to change before surgery

How should I help my child stop using the pacifier?

One of the best ways to stop pacifier use is a way that involves gradually decreasing the size of the pacifier so your child no longer gets the same level of comfort from it.

- To start, find all of your child's pacifiers and poke seven or eight large holes in the "nipple" of the pacifier.
- Day two or three, snip off the tips of all the pacifiers (be sure to take off the entire tip – do not leave any small pieces attached to the pacifier).
- ☐ By day four or five, make a long cut from the top of the pacifier nipple (tip should already be cut off) to the base.
- ☐ At this point, child will most likely no longer look for or request pacifiers but if they continue to look for them, gradually cut off more and more of the pacifier.

Why is it important to start this process early?

Sucking fulfills two basic needs for babies:

- It gives nutrition. It is important to start this process early to make sure that your child is able to drink all of his or her milk from the cup to make sure he or she gets enough hydration, growth and development after surgery.
- It is a calming, comforting activity that helps babies self-soothe. Your child will need time and help from you to develop another way to find comfort. New calming/comforting ideas include:
 - A special blanket or stuffed animal
 - Comforting activity with primary caregiver, such as cuddling, patting, rocking, and/or singing.
 - Calming music

When should I call the Cleft Clinic?

This sheet is not specific to your child, but provides general information. If you have any questions or if your child is not taking all of his/her milk from the cup at least one month before surgery, please call the Cleft Clinic at 612-813-6888.

For more reading material about this and other health topics, please call or visit the Family Resource Center library, or visit our website: childrensMN.org/A-Z.