

Changing from Bottles to Cups for babies with a cleft involving the palate

When do I start offering a cup to my baby?

Your baby is ready to try drinking from a cup at the same time as babies without a cleft (about 6 months of age).

If your baby is having difficulty with bottles, or is requiring supplementary tube feeds, please contact your Cleft Team/Speech & Language Therapist before offering drinks by cup.

Signs that your baby is ready for a trial of cup feeding:

- Holds head up, sitting upright with little support
- Grasping at objects and putting hands in mouth
- Acting interested in food during family meal times



General tips:

- Introduce a cup for drinks of water or milk from 6 months of age (if your baby is under 6 months of age any water offered by bottle/cup should be boiled first and left to cool) .
- Offer the cup when your baby is awake, thirsty, happy and playful.
- Always offer drinks by cup before a bottle. Make sure your baby can't see their bottle when you are offering the cup.
- At the beginning the plan is to allow your baby explore and learn about the cup, and not to replace their bottle.
- Start with small amounts (15-30mls) once a day, building up the amount as your baby's skills improve.
- Do not offer juices even if they are marketed as 'tooth-kind'.
- Expect cup feeding to be a messy experience until your baby has passed their 1st birthday.
- Gradually replace the bottle feeds with drinks from a cup. The morning bottle is usually the easiest to replace with the night-time bottle the hardest.

Why is it important to introduce drinking from a cup?

- Drinking from a cup is part of the normal developmental milestones for a child.
- It may help the recovery after their palate repair as they will have options other than a bottle to drink from.
- It will help with cleansing the mouth from food both before and after their palate repair.
- It encourages good eating and dental hygiene habits.
- Bottles, especially night-time bottles, should not be used after 12 to 18 months of age to reduce your child's risk of developing tooth decay.

What cup is best?

- An open cup is recommended to develop drinking skills rather than a cup with a spout/lid. If you do use a cup with a spout/lid make sure it's free flowing (before your baby's palate surgery they will not have the strong suck needed to get liquid out of non-spill/360 cups).
- Every baby is different and there is no one cup that suits all. You may need to experiment with different sizes and shapes.
- Examples to try are: an open cup, the Doidy cup, Tommee Tippee easy flow cup.
- Cups with straws can only be offered **6 weeks after** surgery as the suck will not be strong enough before repair, and they may interfere with healing.
- Cups with straws are good for developing a baby's oral skills but it takes time to develop this skill.



Where can I get more information on spoon/cup feeding?

- General information on www.hse.ie and www.bordbia.ie and www.mychild.ie
- Advice from your Public Health Nurse, GP, Cleft Team
- Information & networking on cleft sites www.cleft.ie www.clapa.com