

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 (from 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 12 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. It might help if they can see other family members using cups/glasses at mealtimes.
- 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.
- **Do not** offer cups with straws until 6 weeks after your baby's surgery as 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

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Approval date: July 2026 (Version 2)

Revision date: July 2029

Information correct at time of print