

When your baby won't take a bottle

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It Doesn't Mean You're A Failure

Breast is best — until it's time for your baby to take a bottle.



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So here's the thing about breastfeeding: We're told, as mothers, over and over again how great and important breastfeeding is and how much we should dedicate our lives to making sure our babies only drink that liquid gold, but then a funny thing happens:

Your baby might refuse to take a bottle.

When my first baby was born, I got "lucky," if you will, on introducing her to a bottle. Three days after we brought her home from the hospital, I woke up with a 105-degree fever and was rushed to the hospital, where I remained for a good week on IV antibiotics with a raging kidney infection. I was able to pump and resume breastfeeding when I was discharged, but during my stay, my daughter happily sucked down a bottle from my stressed-out husband and frantic mother, who cared for her while I was sick.

In a way, because I never really had to "work" at getting a baby on a bottle, I didn't realize that

it truly could be work — so when my son was born a few years later, I relished in taking as much time off of work as possible and easing my way back into short shifts that allowed me to continue feeding him. And then one day, I got stuck at work and he refused to take a bottle — for 12. Whole. Hours. (For the record, I'm a nurse, so it wasn't negligence, I swear, just a full moon and a million admitted patients.)

From that day on, I felt a bit embarrassed by my failures in getting my baby to take a bottle — he just wouldn't do it, come high or hell water, and even though I had to work, no one wanted to babysit for me, because who wants to watch a screaming baby who refuses to eat? It was a miserable time and I vowed to never wait that long to introduce a baby to a bottle again.

Michael Zollicoffer, M.D., a pediatrician at the [Herman & Walter Samuelson Children's Hospital at Sinai](#) in Baltimore, says that the hardest thing about getting a baby who prefers breast over bottle to eat is getting past that miserable crying stage. "The number one challenge that I see for babies who refuse to take a bottle is the parents' mindset," he explains. "Some parents don't want to let their infant cry at all, so when the baby starts fussing or crying, Mom immediately starts to breastfeed. If the parents can stay strong and keep offering a bottle as an alternative, their infant will begin to drink from it."

My son may have been extraordinarily stubborn, but Dr. Zollicoffer insists that time is all you need to get your baby on the bottle — and that it may be necessary to enlist the help of a trusty grandparent. "If Mom and Dad don't think they can listen to their little one crying, they can physically leave the house for a while and entrust him or her to someone they rely on, like a grandparent, who will keep offering the bottle to the baby," he suggests.

Dr. Zollicoffer also has few other tips for getting a stubborn baby to take a bottle:

- Buy bottles with slow-flow nipples so the baby can get the milk from this new source without getting too much at one time.
- Alternating between bottles with breast milk (from a breast pump) and formula is also a good way to transition from the breast. Mothers can use bottles with formula for half of the day and breast milk for the other half of the day so that their babies get used to both.
- You can also try different-sized nipples and bottles before you find one that your baby will like. You'll be surprised at what a difference even the preference for a nipple can make.

In the end, it is possible to get those booby-loving babies on a bottle, but you just need a little time, patience and maybe a close family member who doesn't mind a screaming baby for a few hours. "I've been practicing for more than 30 years, and I've learned that babies are smart," notes Dr. Zollicoffer. "They know how to suck and will not allow themselves to be hungry for too long."

And there you have it. Anyone else have a problem with a baby who wouldn't take a bottle that can offer up some advice?