

Facts about cups

Whether breast or bottle-fed, babies need to progress to drinking from a cup, usually alongside breast/bottle during weaning. There are so many different cups on the market that claim to make the transition easy for children – it can be confusing for parents and us! Here are the main categories of cups:

Open cups – these are cups without lids.

Unvalved/sippy cups/beakers – these are cups that have lids and usually have a spout with holes in – if they are held upside down the liquid should drip freely from the holes.

Valved cups – these are lidded cups which have valves inside to stop the liquid pouring/leaking out. They need to be bitten or sucked hard to access the drink inside – if they are held upside down no liquid will drip from them.

Sports caps – these need to be pulled open and then sucked to access the drink.

Children who drink mainly from valved cups and sports cap cups are at risk of damage to their developing mouth shape as well as of dental decay. Valved cup spouts are designed to be non-spill. They are usually made of hard plastic and need to be bitten or sucked hard to release liquid which is not good for growing teeth and mouths as it affects how a child learns to sip. This may result in the tongue coming further forward than it should, the back of the tongue becoming stronger than it should, and the lips becoming weaker than they should be, causing dribbling. Drinking from these cups may also concentrate the flow of liquid onto the teeth – any liquid other than water can cause decay if concentrated onto the teeth in this way. In 2008, 31% of 5-year-olds showed obvious signs of dental decay.

Often, parents choose valved cups for convenience and cleanliness. In many ways they are no different to bottles, so moving from bottles to valved cups is not a recommended step.

Children who mainly drink from non-valved lidded cups do not need to suck as hard to release liquid; however, the spouts are often hard. Open cups are recommended as they allow children's delicate, developing mouths and teeth to grow as they should.

Recommendations

- Babies should be given the chance to drink from a cup from weaning at six months (or when they can sit up unsupported and hold something on their own)
- They can be weaned immediately to an open cup with *small* amounts of liquid to reduce the risk of spills as well as plenty of help and patience from the adults around them
- Give babies empty cups to play with so that they get used to holding them
- Mop up any spills calmly and patiently
- Give heaps of praise for drinking from open cups

Questions

- When should a baby be introduced to an open cup?
- How can you tell if a lidded cup is valved or not?
- Name two helpful tips for successful weaning onto open cups.
- How can valved cups affect a baby's oral development?



Facts about dummies

Most babies have a natural strong sucking reflex and a dummy can help to calm or settle them. Ongoing research shows that for babies up to six months that have a dummy to go to sleep there may be a reduction in the risk of cot death. Dummies can help premature babies develop their sucking reflex.

Dummy use can have a harmful effect on children's health, establishment of breastfeeding, physical development as well as communication, speech and language development. They can harbour bacteria which are passed into the mouth and can cause tummy upsets, ear infections that could lead to glue ear and infections leading to dental problems. If dipped into something sweet they can cause tooth decay. As the bone is still forming, dummies can change the shape of the upper jaw and tooth alignment by pushing upper teeth forward to create a space between the upper and lower teeth, potentially leading to a brace or even surgery in later life.

With the teeth out of line, some speech sounds may be more difficult. Speech could also be affected if the baby has the dummy in their mouth for long periods of time as they become less inclined to babble – a vital stage of learning how to make sounds. As they get older they may possibly talk with the dummy in their mouth preventing them from making sounds correctly and using other sounds instead to compensate.

Glue ear, which is linked to dummy use, can have a huge impact on the child's hearing and ability to develop listening skills, which are important for learning to understand and use language.

From 12 months, dummy use can develop into a habit and can be difficult to give up for both children and carers. This becomes even more difficult as the child gets older.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that from six months dummy use is reduced with the aim of moving on completely from 12 months
- If using a dummy, choose an orthodontic dummy as the shape of the teat causes less damage to teeth
- Only use a dummy for sleep/nap times or to soothe when upset
- A dummy is not recommended until breastfeeding is well established (around 6-8 weeks)
- Tune into the baby's cries to understand what they need
- Find alternative ways of soothing/distracting the baby
- Clean and sterilise dummies for babies up to six months; beyond six months make sure they are cleaned thoroughly
- Store dummies in clean, individual containers (not plastic bags)

Follow the 'look, listen and think' rule.

LOOK at your baby. Can you see something that is making them sad that you can fix?

LISTEN to their cries – you might be able to tell what they want by their different cries.

THINK about what else could help – try distracting them with a song, cuddle, favourite toy, etc.

Questions for staff discussion

- Why can dummies calm or soothe babies?
- Why do dummies need to be kept clean?
- Why is it better to give up a dummy before 12 months?
- In what ways could dummy use affect children's communication, speech and language development?

Activity feedback sheet – bottles

Question	Answer	Additional information
What liquids are more likely to cause tooth decay?	Sugary drinks, including milk.	It is important for young children to have milk but drinking from an open cup rather than a bottle lessens the time the sugar is in contact with the teeth.
What are the only liquids which should be given in a bottle?	Milk or water.	This is an NHS recommendation supported by dieticians and dentists.
In a setting, why should babies be fed by the same key person at each feed whenever possible?	The closeness of feeding helps to develop a bond between the baby and carer.	Close relationships help the baby to feel more secure in a setting. Babies with close early relationships go on to develop other relationships more easily.
When should bottle use be stopped?	Bottle use should be reduced from 12 months and completely stopped as soon as possible after this.	This is to avoid developing a more established habit which may be hard to break and to ensure good oral development.

Activity feedback sheet – cups

Question	Answer	Additional information
When should a baby be introduced to an open cup?	At weaning, around six months, or when the baby is old enough to sit up unsupported and hold something on their own.	This is recommended by dietitians, dentists and speech and language therapists.
How can you tell if a lidded cup is valved or not?	Hold the cup upside down – if the liquid runs freely there is no valve. If the cup has a valve no liquid will leak out.	If you try drinking from a valved cup you can see just how hard babies need to suck to drink the liquid.
Name two helpful tips for successful weaning onto open cups.	<p>Only place a small amount of liquid in the cup.</p> <p>Mop up spills calmly – be prepared with cloths close at hand.</p> <p>Give heaps of praise.</p> <p>Give the baby an empty cup to play with.</p>	<p>Small amounts are more manageable and mean there is less mess to clean up if spilled.</p> <p>A calm, stress-free experience for baby and adults will mean they are more likely to achieve success and want to use an open cup.</p> <p>Playing with cups helps the baby learn how to hold and control them.</p>
How can valved cups affect a baby's oral development?	<p>Children who use mainly valved cups are at risk of damage to their developing mouth shape.</p> <p>When used with any liquid other than water, children are also at increased risk of dental decay, as the flow of liquid is concentrated onto the teeth.</p>	Valved cup spouts need to be bitten or sucked hard to release liquid. This may result in the tongue coming further forward than it should, the back of the tongue becoming stronger than it should and the lips becoming weaker than they should be, causing dribbling and preventing children from learning how to sip.