

Learning to Drink from a Cup

- Drinking, like walking or talking, is a developmental skill. It is important to practice drinking from a cup in steps to help your child learn.
- Before starting to use a cup to drink, ensure your child can sit up and hold his or her head up well.
- Introduce cups for your child to play with and explore at around 6 months of age.
- Show your child how you drink from a cup.
- Expect lots of spilling when your child is learning to drink. Your child will need your help in the beginning.
- Pick a small cup that fits your baby's mouth such as a cup that holds 1-2 oz (30-60 mL).

Steps in learning to drink

Children often develop cup drinking skills at these ages:

Age 6-9 months

- The skills needed to drink from a cup are starting to emerge (holding a cup, closing lips on a cup rim, taking sips, keeping the jaw stable). Expect lots of spilling.
- In the beginning, you can practice sipping from the side of a spoon to help your child learn to close his or her lips and take sips.
- Start by filling a cup with a small amount (about 1 teaspoon or 5 mL).
- Introduce a cup with a narrower opening in the top.
- You can help your child learn to take sips by holding the cup at his or her mouth.
- Use empty cups for play, holding, and exploring. Your child can play with small cups in the kitchen while you are cooking.
- Make learning to drink from a cup fun! Fill a bowl of fresh water for your baby to dip and fill a small cup to practice pouring and bringing it to the mouth.



Choosing a Cup

Start with a small open or straw cup. This helps your child learn to take sips.

Open Cup



Cup with straw



No-spill cups have a valve in them. With a no-spill cup, your child must suck like when drinking from a bottle instead of learning to take sips.

No-spill cups with valve



Age 10-12 months

- At this age, children are learning to lift a cup to their lips on their own but will often need help to prevent spilling while tipping to take a drink.
- Children are also learning to keep their lips closed while swallowing.
- Sometimes children may get too big a mouthful and will let the water spill out of their mouth or cough. They may need your help to take smaller sips.
- Begin to introduce a short, wide straw in a cup.
- Try cups with handles that are easier for your child to hold.
- By 1 year of age, children can often use a cup instead of a bottle for most drinks while sitting.

Age 13-15 months

- Your child's lips now close well on a cup rim or straw.
- Your child is learning how to control the size of sips and needs less help.
- Children start to take many sips and swallows in a row before taking a breath.
- They can hold and tip the cup on their own with less spilling from the mouth while drinking.

16-18 months

- Children are now often able to drink from a cup without help; there may be some spilling.
- They can drink from a cup with a wider opening.
- By this age, most children are ready to move away from using a bottle to using only a cup.

19-24 months

- Children can now tip a cup up to take a sip and drink with little to no spilling.
- Most children are ready to move fully to an open or straw cup.

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Keep in mind:

Make sure your child is sitting upright and well-supported while learning to drink.



If your child is breast, bottle and/or tube fed, keep using this method to provide the nutrition your child needs while building their cup drinking skills.

