

**D**espite what he may think, water isn't just for your little one to knock off the highchair tray. Drinks are actually an important element of weaning, because they help your baby digest his food properly and keep him hydrated, particularly as his milk intake will reduce naturally.

As well as exposing him to new textures, smells and tastes, the start of the weaning process is the perfect time to introduce a cup and teach your child to take sips of water as he eats. It's best to take new steps gently and gradually, but you should aim to get him using a cup instead of a bottle by a year old. We spoke to Sigrid Daniel, childcare expert and UK director of care.com, about what to consider.

### Plenty of fluids

As your baby eats more solid food and you get into a routine of feeding, the amount of milk he wants will decrease. You might notice a little bit of constipation – in most cases this is nothing to worry about, but it's important to make sure you give him extra fluids throughout the day to make his stools softer.

"In general babies who are solely breast- or bottle-fed should be getting enough fluids. It's only when solids are established that extra drinks other than milk usually need to be offered," Sigrid says. If he's feeling dehydrated, your little one will certainly let you know.

### Banish the bottle

Sometimes it can be a challenge to get babies to give up their bottle, but introducing a cup sooner rather than later can make the process of breaking the habit much easier. Trainer cups can be used from 5 months old, as long as your baby can confidently sit upright, otherwise there could be a risk of choking.

"Make sure your baby's ready for this stage, in the same way you'd check he's ready for solids. Can he hold his head and sit up steadily? Is he able to reach out and bring a sippy cup to his mouth?"

Sigrid says. Pop a tiny amount of water in the cup to begin with – he won't need to drink much and it will make it easier to pick up the cup and learn how to hold it.

### What kind of cup is best?

There are many different types, so try experimenting with a few until you find one he likes. "Current NHS advice is to allow your child access to an open cup with a soft spout that gives easier sipping. This is to protect teeth, and to discourage your baby from getting into the habit of taking drinks as a 'comfort' suck," Sigrid explains. A non-handled cup with a soft spout will be easier for you to hold to help your baby at first. Then as he grows and his coordination improves, try one with handles and a free-flow lid, so he can learn to hold and drink from the cup himself. Hygiene is important and if you serve milk from a cup to a baby under 12 months, the spout, cup and handles should all be sterilised.

### What's to drink?

Water is the best and if he's under 6 months old, you should give him boiled water that's been cooled. After 6 months he can have ordinary tap water. Avoid bottled water though, because it can contain high levels of salt (sodium) or sulphate, which isn't good for him.

Also try not to give your little one juice and squash, as they can weaken tooth enamel and encourage a sweet tooth. "Continued comfort-sucking on drinks such as fruit juices or sweetened drinks is a major cause of teeth decay among children," Sigrid says. "With juices, the best option is to give them diluted and with meals only. Or alternatively, miss them out entirely and just give water – soft mashed fruit can provide the vitamin C children need." 

### HOW MUCH MILK?

- ◆ **6mths** Breastfeeding: On demand. Bottle-feeding: Four to five formula feeds totalling 500-600ml in 24 hours.
- ◆ **7-9mths** Breastfeeding: On demand. Bottle-feeding: Offer up to 500-600ml of formula per day, but don't worry if his intake declines.
- ◆ **10mths** Aim for two to three feeds, whether breast or bottle. Offer up to, but no more than, 400-600ml of formula within 24 hours.
- ◆ **11mths** Encourage your child to take 400-500ml of milk each day, ideally from a cup.
- ◆ Remember that once your baby is weaned, he can get some of his milk allowance from other dairy products, such as cheese and yoghurt.

### Cheers!

#### ◆ The perfect starter cup...

Tubby, £3.49,  
vitalbaby.co.uk

#### ◆ Great for making the transition from a bottle...

Dr Brown's Natural Flow Soft Spout Trainer Cup, £5.10,  
drbrowns.co.uk

#### ◆ Good for every age and stage...

Brother Max 4-in-1 Trainer Cup, £5.99,  
brothermax.co.uk

#### ◆ Prevent spillages...

Tumtum Tiny Beaker, £6,  
tumtums.com

#### ◆ Teach him to drink and to sip...

Babycup, £7.50 for four,  
nctshop.co.uk

