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THE GIVE-IT-UP GUIDE

Simple ways to get
your baby to say so long
to the Binky, bottle,
blankie, and more.



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One day soon your baby is going to be ready for graduation—well, from the bottle to the sippy cup at least. On that special morning you'll proudly hoist your child out of his crib and announce, "Bottles are history, dude! Bottoms up!" He might be a little sad, but chances are good that he will grab the cup, get drinking, and never look back.

Experts agree that when you wean a young child from breastfeeding and the gadgets that give babies comfort—the swaddle, the bottle, and the pacifier, it's typically not as traumatic as you fear. "It may take a few days, but babies can transition easily from one step to another," says pediatrician Tanya Remer Altmann, M.D., author of *Mommy Calls: Dr. Tanya Answers Parents' Top 101 Questions About Babies and Toddlers*. "It's just a matter of sticking with it. Afterward, parents tell me, 'Wow. I didn't realize how easy it was. We could have done it ages ago.'"

The key to stress-free weaning is having a positive attitude, the expectation of success, and a little bit of strategy up your sleeve. Now get ready to say "See ya!"

● No More Nursing

"With breastfeeding, the biggest decision is whether you're truly ready to stop," says New York City lactation consultant Melissa Nagin.

When to wean Aim to nurse exclusively for the first six months, as advised by the American Academy of Pediatrics, and to continue some nursing for at least the first year.

How to do it First, make sure your baby masters using a bottle or a sippy cup with expressed milk, formula, or a combination of the two well before you begin. Remember, babies can't tolerate cow's milk until they're a year old.

To avoid engorgement and ease the transition for you and your little one, replace one breastfeeding with a bottle or cup every four to seven days. Enlist your husband as a key player in the process. Most babies and toddlers are happy to take a bottle or a cup—along with the extra snuggle time with their daddy. When you're ready to drop the pre-bedtime feeding, establish a new routine so that having a bath or hearing a story or a song—rather than nursing—is the last activity of the evening.

Babies can crawl away from a habit without looking back.

● Bye-Bye, Bottle

Because it requires so little effort, toddlers who drink from a "ba-ba" for too long tend to consume more milk than necessary, says pediatrician Laura Jana, M.D., coauthor of *Food Fights*. "They may have little appetite for the variety of solid foods they need to eat, or they may consume too many calories from liquid." Another downside is dental: When kids drink from a bottle, milk pools around their teeth and creates a major cavity risk.

When to wean Between 12 and 15 months, which is when babies can drink well enough from a sippy cup to go completely bottle-free, says Dr. Jana. If you wait more than 18 months, the bottle will have become a habit rather than a necessity and your child will cling to it even harder.

How to do it Introduce the sippy between 6 and 9 months—with milk or formula, not just water or juice. "Otherwise, some babies get the idea that milk only comes out of a bottle and water and juice come out of a cup," says Dr. Jana, and they resist drinking milk from a sippy even though they are able.

Once your child has mastered the cup, around 12 months, say matter-of-factly, "You're a big kid, so you get to use a cup instead of a bottle all the time now." Dr. Jana advises the cold-turkey approach, but you can also eliminate one bottle-feeding at a time, starting with the bedtime bottle. "One-year-olds don't need to eat right before they go to sleep."



Just let the Binky Fairy take it away.

● Peace Out, Pacifier

Your baby's beloved Binky may reduce her risk of SIDS (the sucking activity keeps her from sleeping too deeply), which is why the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends using it at naptime and bedtime for the first year.

When to wean Ideally, between 8 and 12 months. "That's when kids start to form fierce attachments, so it's a great window of opportunity to replace a pacifier (which you might not want to be part of your walking, talking toddler's repertoire) with a lovey such as a small blanket or a stuffed animal—neither of which has any potential negative health consequences," says Dr. Altmann. Research shows that pacifier overuse is linked to ear infections. It's not clear why, but one theory is that the constant sucking pushes excess saliva and fluid toward the baby's eardrum, making her more susceptible. A heavy-duty habit could also alter your child's bite, potentially causing a lisp, says Chicago speech pathologist Carol Mayer.

How to do it For babies, most pediatricians recommend cold turkey because in the long run it's easier on both you and your little one. Though it may be hard, it's not going to be scarring, says Christopher Tolcher, M.D., a spokesman for the AAP in Agoura, California. "Your baby will adapt within a couple of days."

After about age 2, do it gradually. Start by limiting its use to certain places (say, bed), then only during certain times (sleep), until it's gone for good. □

● Sayonara, Swaddle Blanket

There's a lot to love about wrapping your infant up like a burrito. The practice, which limits the startle reflex, may also help infants stay asleep on their back, possibly lowering the risk of SIDS, says pediatrician Harvey Karp, M.D., *Parents* advisor and creator of *The Happiest Baby on the Block* book and DVD.

When to wean Some babies are ready around 4 months, though others need until 6 to 8 months to give up their wrapping. Your baby will eventually want to move around while he sleeps, and he may awaken once he's able to break loose. Obviously, if he wakes himself up trying to get free, that's the surest sign that he's outgrown it. Also, you don't want your increasingly mobile child rolling onto his stomach while he's swaddled, which may be a suffocation hazard.

How to do it Gradually. First wrap your baby toga-style by leaving one arm free. "If he sleeps well this way for a night or two, then unwrap him completely—he's probably ready to say bye-bye to swaddling," says Dr. Karp. If not, put the arm back in and try the one-arm wrap again next month. Playing a white-noise CD all night helps babies wean earlier and sleep well for many more months. "The sound keeps a baby's calming reflex activated," says Dr. Karp. "It's like an auditory teddy bear."

IT'S OKAY TO BE ALL THUMBS If your kid is still a sucker, chill. It's a natural reflex, and it's usually not a problem when your child's under age 4, says Dr. Christopher Tolcher. "Most children give it up before then if you ignore it." Feel your child is headed for bite problems or is already there? Try these tips to help her kick the habit.

DO

Distract your child with a project where she needs to use her hands. Kids often fall back on sucking when they're bored.

DON'T

Create a thumb aversion with yucky-tasting nail polish. Drawing attention to your child's habit may just make it worse.

DO

Use rewards. Kids may not care about their teeth, but they do want to please you and get prizes! Give big hugs and stickers.

DON'T

Tell him "Stop it; you're not a baby." Be direct instead and say "I can't understand you when your thumb is in your mouth."