

BREASTFEEDING ANSWERS

Finger Feeding

Finger feeding involves feeding milk to your baby through a feeding tube that is attached to your finger. It can be used with any baby that needs extra milk. Finger feeding can make the transition to breastfeeding easier.

You will need:

- Supplement fluid – expressed breast milk or a breast milk substitute if breast milk is not available
- 36-inch #5 French feeding tube
- A bottle with a nipple
- Small syringe for cleaning the tube
- Scissors and tape

Setting up to finger feed:

1. Wash your hands. Be sure your fingernail on the finger you will use is short.
2. Make the bottle nipple hole larger by cutting it with clean scissors.
3. Insert the smaller tip of the feeding tube through the hole in the bottle nipple so that the larger end will sit in the bottle
4. Pour the supplement into the bottle.
5. Put the larger end of the feeding tube into the bottle making sure it is covered with milk.
6. Screw the nipple and cap onto the bottle. This will prevent spilling.
7. Position yourself in a comfortable position-your baby should be on your lap
8. Place the bottle at the level of your chest. For example, tucked into your bra, shirt pocket, or on a flat surface nearby.



Caution: If the bottle is too high, the milk will flow too fast (and your baby could choke). If the bottle is too low, your baby may become frustrated or lose interest in feeding.

9. Line up the end of the feeding tube so that it sits on the soft part (pad) of your index finger. The tip of the feeding tube should extend 6mm (quarter inch) past your fingertip. You may tape the tube onto your finger (see picture). Be sure that baby cannot suck the tape into their mouth.
10. Gently touch your baby's lips with your finger and wait until their mouth opens. Allow the baby to pull your finger into their mouth. The pad of the finger will eventually reach the roof of the baby's mouth. Baby then will begin sucking and drawing milk from the tube.

Cleaning the tube

- Fill a syringe with hot water. Insert the syringe into the larger end of the tube. Push the plunger to force water into the tube. Repeat 3-5 times
- Soap is not needed but if you choose to use soap, make sure the tube is rinsed very well.
- Use the syringe to force 1-2 plungers of air through the tube to get rid of any water.
- Air dry the tube in a clean area.
- Use a new tube when the tube becomes stiff, brittle or discoloured.
- If using breast milk substitute (formula), use a new tube each day
- Clean the bottle and nipple as usual.

How long should I finger feed my baby?

Usually finger-feeding is a temporary measure. It is important for you and your baby to have regular appointments at a breastfeeding clinic or Health Care Provider while finger feeding. These appointments help us to make decisions on how long to finger feed and how much supplement is needed.





For more information call: Family Health Information Line at 705-474-1400 ext. 5351 or healthy.families@healthunit.ca. Our nurses are available from 8:30 a.m to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday

Reference: Breastfeeding Answers: A Guide for Helping Families, Second Edition by Nancy Mohrbacher; IBC (2021)

Centre for Disease Control (2024): <https://www.cdc.gov/hygiene/faq/>

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