

Lactation Aid

 ibconline.ca/information-sheets/lactation-aid

A lactation aid is a method that allows the baby to be supplemented with expressed breastmilk, formula, glucose water with added colostrum, or plain glucose water without using a bottle or any other alternative feeding method. The lactation aid is better than using a syringe, cup feeding, finger feeding or any other method, since the baby is on the breast and breastfeeding.

Benefits of Using the Lactation Aid for Supplementing

1. Babies learn to breastfeed by breastfeeding.
2. Breastfeeding parents learn to breastfeed by breastfeeding.
3. The baby continues to get the milk from the breast even while being supplemented.
4. The baby will not likely refuse the breast, which is very possible if supplementing away from the breast.
5. Breastfeeding is a relationship! There is much more to breastfeeding than the breastmilk.

A note about bottles: The use of bottles with a baby of any age may result in the baby becoming fussy at the breast or even refusing the breast. This is because bottles provide fast and consistent flow that the baby may begin to prefer over the flow of the breast which is often variable in quantity and flow rate. Bottles also teach babies a different latch and suck that can result in slower flow from the breast.

Though bottles do not always cause problems, their use when there are already breastfeeding challenges will rarely make things better and usually makes things worse.

And newer bottle nipples are no better than the old ones; that's just good marketing!

What is a Lactation Aid?

A lactation aid consists of a container for the supplement—usually a feeding bottle with the nipple hole cut to be larger—and a long, thin tube leading from this container. A medical feeding tube that is 91 cm (36 inches) long with a diameter of “5 French” works best. Do not cut off the end of the tube as cutting it makes the end sharp.

Manufactured lactation aids are available and are easier to use in some situations, but not necessarily. In fact, we believe our “homemade” one is usually easier to use and much less expensive to buy.

Please Note: Using a tube with a syringe, with or without a plunger, instead of the setup mentioned above, is usually more difficult to use and does not make the lactation aid any better. Also, pushing the milk into the baby's mouth with the syringe does not teach the baby how to breastfeed because he/she gets milk even if sucking poorly.

Using a Lactation Aid

Use of the lactation aid should be shown by a person experienced in helping with breastfeeding.

Option 1:

Ensure the baby is well latched. See the “Latching and Feeding Management” information sheet. Generally, the tube should be added after the baby has breastfed on both breasts and the flow has slowed down on the second breast (baby is mostly sucking with a few drinks), but your Lactation Consultant may recommend something different depending on your situation.

Gently ease the breast away so the corner of the baby's mouth is seen. Hold the tube close to the end with your index finger and thumb. Bit by bit, slide the tube under the baby's top lip (anywhere between the middle of the top lip and the corner of the mouth). The tube should slide into baby's mouth alongside the nipple – push the tube away from the breast and aim it toward the roof of baby's mouth. See our video clip showing this.

Option 2:

Hold the tube alongside the nipple, with the tip of the tube just slightly past the tip of the nipple. Latch the baby onto the breast and the tube all at once.

The lactation aid is well placed when the supplement works its way down the tube quickly as the baby sucks. There is usually no need to fill the tube with supplement before putting it into the baby's mouth. Use the lactation aid whenever necessary to keep the baby drinking. Better eight supplements a day of 30 ml (1 ounce) per feeding than 2 large supplements a day of 120 ml (4 ounces) each, for example.

Allow the baby to drink as much supplement as he or she wants. The baby will stop eating when he/she is full – the baby cannot be overfed when getting the supplement by lactation aid at the breast.



Helpful Tips

1. There are three holes in the end of the tube of our system – all of the holes must be in baby's mouth for it to work.
2. The better the baby's latch, the easier the lactation aid is to use. Note: a tongue-tie can prevent a baby from achieving an optimal latch and can make the lactation aid more difficult to use.
3. It is occasionally helpful for the mother to hold the tube in place with her finger, as some babies tend to push the tube out of position with their tongues.
4. The tube may be taped to the breast if the mother desires, though this is not necessary and not always helpful.
5. The bottle containing the supplement should generally not be higher than the baby's head. If the lactation aid functions only when the bottle is held higher than the baby's head, something is wrong. Keep the bottle higher only if the doctor or lactation consultant suggests this (for example, in the care of a baby who refuses the breast).
6. The container can be held, placed on a table or another surface, tucked into the bra or neck of a shirt, or put into the pocket of a button-down shirt.
7. It should not take a long time for the baby to drink the supplement. If it is taking a long time, the tube is probably not well positioned, the baby is poorly latched on, or both. When the lactation aid is functioning well, it takes 15-20 minutes, usually less, for the baby to take 30 ml (1 ounce) of the supplement.

Cleaning the Device

- Use a syringe to flush out the tube with hot water (soapy water may be used if desired but be sure to rinse the tube well with hot water).
- Use the empty syringe to push some air through the tube to help it dry. Hang the tube to finish drying.
- Do not boil the tube of the non-manufactured aid. It is not made to be boiled.
- Clean the bottle as usual.
- The end of the tube that goes into the baby's mouth will get stiff with use. You will notice this after a few days to about a week, depending on how often you use the tube. When the tube is stiff, replace it. Do not cut the end of the tube off.

Weaning the Baby from the Lactation Device

Generally, the baby will begin to take less and less supplement as the breastfeeding improves and/or the breastmilk supply increases.

It is best to allow the baby to decide when the supplement is no longer needed, rather than decreasing how much or how often supplement is offered .

Watch the baby at the breast. If you can keep the baby drinking well using breast compressions and switching sides, then you likely do not need the lactation aid at that feeding. If in doubt, add the tube after feeding on at least both breasts – if the baby is full he/she will not take much (or anything) from the supplement container.

The lactation aid may be required for just a few days to several weeks. Usually, the amount of supplement required in the lactation aid increases over the first one or two weeks of use, and then levels out for a variable period of time before decreasing. The whole process may take two to eight weeks or longer, although some mothers have used the device only a few days, whereas others have not been able to stop using it at all until the baby was well established on solids.

Do not be discouraged and do not try to force the weaning. Rapid improvement sometimes occurs after a long period of little change.

If the lactation aid is still being used when the baby is ready for solid foods, the baby can be transition from taking supplement at the breast to eating food, with or without the supplement mixed into it. See the “Starting Solid Foods” information sheet.

The information presented here is general and not a substitute for personalized treatment from an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) or other qualified medical professionals.

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Questions or concerns? Email Dr. Jack Newman (read the page carefully, and answer the listed questions).

Make an appointment at the Newman Breastfeeding Clinic.