



Self Care Eating Meals

Using a Cup Information Sheet

Mealtimes are an important aspect of family life. Children begin to develop self-feeding skills from birth. Drinking from a cup is a complex task and takes a number of years to master. Between 2 and 4 months a baby will move it's hands to the breast/bottle while feeding. Between 6 and 9 months a baby can hold a bottle in both hands. They can often drink from a cup if it is held and tipped for them. By 15 months a child can usually hold a cup with both hands and take a few sips without help. By 18 months they can use a straw and by 3 years a child can drink from a cup without a lid without spilling.



Hints and Tips

- It is important that your child is well positioned when they are learning any new skill. Initially ensure your child is well supported in a high chair or on your lap. You can use cushions or rolled up towels to help your child to stay sitting up straight in their high chair.
- As they grow it is important that their feet and back are supported so that they can use their hands freely. Whenever possible ensure that your child is sitting at a table. You could use a sturdy box under their feet and cushions on the chair to make sure they are well supported.
- Always set the dishes and utensils out in the same way to develop a routine and help your child locate items at each meal.
- Think about the cups you are using. Try a variety of cups with lids at the early stages and move towards using an open cup or beaker. Try a beaker/ cup with a rim. Sometimes using something heavier is easier, a beaker/cup with a weighted bottom can help. Use cups with handles (one or two). Avoid light plastic cups which are easily knocked over.



- Also think about how much liquid you put in the cup. Too little and your child will have to tip the cup and their head back. Too full and your child may be unable to control the flow of the liquid and any spill will be messy.



- Take your time and be consistent. Learning a new skill takes time so persevere with giving support until you feel that the child is making progress.
- Practice, practice, practice! Give your child opportunities for practice every day.
- A good way to teach your child a new skill is to break down each task into small steps and teach them the last step first (this is called backward chaining). Once they can do the last step of the task, teach them the second last step, then the third last step and so on. For drinking from a cup the following steps may be appropriate.
 - Put the cup to your child's lip and tip. Your child has to take a sip from the cup.
 - Put the cup to your child's lip. Your child then tips the cup and takes a sip.
 - Your child lifts the cup to their lip and then tips the cup to take a sip.
- Children learn in different ways so you might need to vary your approach. There are a number of ways in which you can help;
 - Physically assist your child - use the hand-over-hand technique by letting your child grasp the cup while you put your hand over the top of their hand to guide them.
 - Show your child - do the task alongside your child.
 - Tell your child - talk your child through each step of the process.



You can use each of these ways individually or any combination depending on what suits your child. Please be aware that some children cannot look and listen at the same time so limit the amount of information you give.

Ways to physically assist your child using a cup

- Your child can hold onto your hand as the cup is brought to their mouth.
- Hand-over-hand – your child grasps the cup while you put their hand over the top of your child's hand.
- Your child grasps the cup whilst you hold the bottom to guide the movement.
- Your child grasps the cup while you help the child by supporting and guiding from the elbow.
- You can also practice using a cup during other activities e.g. during pretend play, during craft activities, water or sand play etc. Give your child the opportunity to practice pouring and making drinks. Use smaller bottles and small jugs etc.

