

CHOOSING FEEDING EQUIPMENT

Equipment can be a helpful partner in enabling the child to use the best eating patterns possible. Both major and subtle differences are found in equipment in each category. Variations in shape or size can make a major difference for a given child. This makes it impossible to list a specific piece or brand of equipment that will be most effective for your child. Here is a list of the general characteristics of nipples, cups, and spoons that we've found helpful.

Characteristics of an Effective Nipple

- The nipple fits the size and shape of the child's mouth.
- The nipple flow rate is appropriate for the infant's abilities, the consistency of the liquid being presented, and the infant's feeding position. The holes in the nipple are not artificially enlarged, causing a rapid, uncontrolled flow of liquid. Some nipples feature an adjustable flow rate by turning the orientation of the nipple in the baby's mouth.
- The nipple provides an adequate stiffness or resistance to the individual infant's sucking pattern. A softer nipple may be more appropriate for the infant or child whose suck is weak or who tends to tire easily. The nipple should not collapse with the child's sucking.
- The nipple provides a thin or narrowed area between the gums for the infant who has a jaw thrust or a bite reflex.
- Thin tubing that does not interfere with the nursing process and provides the infant with an additional regulated amount of liquid assists the liquid flow from the nipple of the breast-feeding mother.

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- Thin tubing that attaches to the mother's finger, which is used to stimulate the infant's sucking, facilitates the liquid flow into the infant's mouth.

Characteristics of an Effective Bottle

- The shape of the bottle supports the head positioning needs of the infant.
- The bottle holds the appropriate amount of fluid. A bottle that is too small will need to be refilled during the feeding to provide the correct amount of fluid. This can be disruptive to the flow of the feeding process.
- The bottle is easy and pleasing for the infant to hold.
- The bottle fits the size and shape of the feeder's hand.
- The bottle is easily sturdy and unbreakable.
- The bottle can be colored or decorated to attract and maintain the infant's visual attention.

Characteristics of an Effective Cup

- The cup can be tipped up to get liquid at the bottom without tipping the child's head back.
- The spout on a sipper cup supports good jaw and lip closure. It does not require the child to tip the head back to drink.
- The cup does not shatter or break if the child bites the edge.

- The cup allows the feeder a clear view of the child's mouth.
- The cup provides a mechanism for graded control of the liquid flow for the child whose ability to handle a larger volume of liquid is poor.
- The cup provides a thick or rolled edge for extra stability if the child needs to hold the edge of the cup with the teeth.
- The cup provides an appropriate physical shape and an appropriate means for self-holding of the cup for the child who is a self-feeder.
- The cup is easy to hold and regulate liquid flow when an adult holds it.
- The cup is colored or decorated when it is used specifically to attract and maintain the child's attention.
- The cup meets the need for success for both the child and parent. Many parents view a reduction in spilling as very important to the success of cup drinking.

Characteristics of an Effective Straw

- The straw can be tall or short, narrow or wide depending on the sucking skills of the child.
- The straw can be cut, bent, or adjusted to teach a mature straw-drinking pattern.
- The straw does not shatter or break if the child chews or bites it.

- The straw can be used with other adaptive equipment to provide needed support or control for the lips.
- The straw provides for graded control of the liquid flow for the child whose ability to handle a larger volume of liquid is poor.
- The straw can be used while sitting at the table, or used when the child is in the car seat or stroller. Travel straws included with cups that have lids reduce spillage and are important considerations for parents.

Characteristics of an Effective Spoon

- The bowl of the spoon is relatively flat so that food can be removed easily by the upper lip.
- The spoon does not shatter or break if the child bites down on it.
- The bowl fits the size of the child's mouth.
- Metal spoons are covered, coated, or have a plastic bowl for the child who is hypersensitive to temperature or taste or has a bite reflex.
- The length of the handle is appropriate to the size of the feeder's hand for dependent feeding and appropriate for the child's hand in independent feeding.
- The handle of the spoon is wide, thick, and short for the child who is developing self-feeding skills.
- The spoon can fit into an adaptive handle for holding assistance when necessary.

- The spoon is interesting to the child who is learning independent spoon-feeding. Color and design can attract and maintain the child's attention.
- The spoon is the appropriate weight for the child's independent feeding needs.
- The spoon has a pleasing texture for the child to hold.

Characteristics of an Effective Pacifier

- The pacifier has an outer shield molded to the shape of the lips to provide sustained contact and stimulation for lip closure.
- The pacifier shape and size varies. The pacifier chosen must fit the size and shape of the child's mouth.
- The pacifier provides a thin or narrowed area between the gums for the child who has a jaw thrust or a bite reflex.
- If the infant has difficulties making sensory transitions, the pacifier chosen has the same or similar shape as the preferred nipple.
- Some infants are sensitive or allergic to latex. A non-latex pacifier should be selected if infants are in a high-risk group for latex allergies or have identified allergies.
- The pacifier is well constructed so that it will not come apart when the baby sucks or chews on it.
- Some pacifiers are modified to allow medicine to flow as the infant sucks. These can be used prescriptively to provide liquid during sucking for infants

who are transitioning from pacifier sucking to nipple sucking.

Characteristics of Effective Oral-Facial Stimulation Products

- The product meets the general criteria for product safety. It is constructed of nontoxic materials and does not contain small parts that could come off in the mouth.
- The product can withstand the physical stress of biting and mouthing.
- A product that is given to a child to explore without direct adult supervision must be constructed of materials that will not jab, poke, or injure the mouth or eyes.
- The product can be easily cleaned and disinfected if used with more than one child.
- The product is easy for the adult to use.
- The product is sturdily constructed to withstand daily use.