

# Triple Nipples and Early Weaning

*Babies in breastfeeding cultures usually nurse for at least 2 years. Yet babies in the United States often "wean themselves" before the age of one year, even if their mothers had hoped to nurse longer. What's going on? It's often "Triple Nipple Syndrome": Breast, Bottle, and Pacifier.*

**YOUNG BABIES** don't just wean. They wean to another food source. A bottle nipple is a very effective teaching tool that makes baby's mouth adapt to its rigid shape, then delivers milk no matter what else the baby does. A soft breast needs to be drawn in and shaped by the baby, and delivers milk only when the baby "does it right". The baby who learns the bottle lesson finds that it doesn't work on a breast. The bottle may become a more rewarding food source... and the baby weans to it. The early use of bottles, and also of pacifiers, is linked to nursing problems and early weaning.

**OLDER BABIES** nurse for emotional reasons as well as for food. In our bottle-feeding culture, some mothers are reluctant to nurse more often than every few hours, to nurse in public, to nurse at night, to nurse for sheer pleasure. They may feel more "normal" putting a rubber nipple in the baby's mouth than meeting his emotional needs through frequent nursing. If bottles have been more freely given than nursing, if a pacifier or thumb has been a more reliable source of comfort than mother's breast, a baby may tire of negotiating for nursings and wean.

**HOW CAN YOU PREVENT EARLY WEANING?** By nursing the age-old way: for comfort as much as for food. By not needing a reason for nursing, but letting yourself and your baby keep in touch with each other through frequent nursing. By not using bottles or pacifiers as a regular substitute for yourself. By mothering your baby at the breast, not just feeding your baby at the breast. This relaxed, easy-going approach to breastfeeding actually takes far less energy and less thought than formal "feedings".

**A "NURSING STRIKE"** is a baby's very sudden reluctance to nurse, whether or not he is accustomed to rubber nipples. It is not the same as being ready to wean (which happens gradually), but signals some discomfort in the baby's life: an earache or stuffy nose, houseguests, teething, a parent's new job, being scolded for biting. Nursing strikes are fairly common... and fixable. If your baby "goes on strike," call a breastfeeding specialist or La Leche League for suggestions that will ease you both back into happy breastfeeding. Nursing the baby in his sleep, for instance, is a time-honored way of ending a strike.

**EVERY BABY IS AN INDIVIDUAL.** Some babies are simply ready to stop nursing before their mothers thought they would be. But you'll probably find that your nursing relationship is happier, stronger, easier, and comes to a more satisfying end if you stick to the basics: mother, baby, breast, and time together.

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