

Tube feeding by finger or breast

Information for parents and carers

This leaflet provides advice on how to feed your baby with a feeding tube using your finger or breast. If you have any other questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to your local infant feeding support service.

What is finger feeding?

Finger feeding is an alternative way to feed your baby using an infant feeding tube attached to your finger. We suggest using this technique to improve your baby's tongue function, especially in case of breastfeeding difficulties. If your goal is to establish breastfeeding, it also helps to prevent bottle preference

What are the advantages of finger feeding?

1. Finger feeding uses a similar sucking technique to breastfeeding. It uses the same muscles, and the baby's tongue can move much more than with bottle feeding.
2. Finger feeding allows the baby to control the milk flow, just as breastfeeding does, because milk will not be delivered into their mouth unless they suck (unlike with a bottle).
3. The baby uses a wide-open mouth on the finger to create a deep latch. It's a good idea to use your index or middle finger as they are closest in size to a nipple.
4. The baby must keep their tongue down and forward in the mouth to cover the lower gums, as they would need to do when breastfeeding.
5. It avoids the use of an artificial teat or bottle, with the 'small sucking' that bottle feeding entails.

Finger feeding kit

Your kit should include:

- 1 sterilised feeding bottle (not provided by the tongue-tie clinic)
- 1 feeding tube of 5fr diameter and 75cm length
- 1 enteral syringe (10ml) to clean the inside of the tube
- 1 roll of surgical tape
- your expressed breast milk, donor breast milk or formula milk if neither of these are available



How to assemble your kit

1. Trim your fingernails if needed. A long nail risks accidental injury to the baby's lips or tongue, or inside the cheek.
2. Wash your hands.
3. Fill the sterilised feeding bottle with breast milk or formula milk (amounts vary according to your baby's needs and usual amounts of supplementation used).
4. Cut a hole in the bottle teat and reposition this on your baby's feeding bottle. Thread the feeding tube through this to prevent spillage of milk. The end with the purple top should remain in the bottle with the milk.



5. Cut off the stopper of the feeding tube before using it. This helps the end of the tube sit in the bottom of the container. Do not cut the round tip of the tube, as it can make it sharp and damage the baby's mouth.



6. Face the pad side of your index or middle finger upwards. Place the round end of the sterile feeding tube level with your fingertip. Run the tube along this finger. Tape it in place a few centimetres back from your fingertip, so that it won't enter the baby's mouth.



7. Hold your baby in a comfortable upright sitting position, supporting their neck and shoulders. Stroke your finger against your baby's upper lip. When they open their mouth, let them take your finger into it, pad side up, as far as they are comfortable.



8. Allow your baby to suck your finger and milk will be drawn up the tube into their mouth. Allowing the tube to enter the baby's mouth at the side should be more comfortable for the baby.
9. Try to keep your finger flat to encourage the correct tongue position. Try not to apply pressure to the roof of the mouth.
10. The baby will receive milk as they suck, at their own pace. If feeding is very slow, you can raise the bottle slightly to speed up milk flow.
11. Monitor your baby for stress signs (widened eyes, fingers splaying) and move your finger slightly back out of baby's mouth if they seem stressed.
12. Check that the tube is not rubbing against the roof of your baby's mouth.

Attaching the tube to the breast

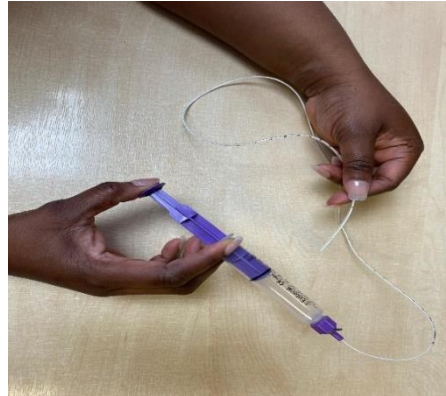
You can also attach and tape the feeding tube to your breast, instead of finger feeding. As your baby breastfeeds, milk will also be drawn up the tube into their mouth.

Ensure the tip of the tube is at the same level of the nipple, and the tube is placed towards the corner of your baby's mouth or at their upper lip, so they can suck comfortably.



Cleaning the tube

1. Wash the tube immediately after each use with warm soapy water to avoid any milk residue drying. Using the 10ml syringe, flush the inside of the tube 5 to 6 times with warm soapy water and then rinse it thoroughly using cold water.



2. Prepare a cold sterilising solution using either sterilising tablets or a pre-made sterilising solution (for example, Milton).
3. Use the syringe to flush the tube through 5 to 6 times with the sterilising solution. Place the tube into the solution in a covered plastic container. Leave it until the sterilising process is complete (usually 15 minutes but check the manufacturer instructions). You may rinse the tube with cooled boiled water if you wish to remove the bleach-like taste of the solution, but this is not necessary.
4. Flush the tube with air, to remove any excess water that may be present inside. Leave it to air dry and store it in a clean airtight container or zip-lock bag ready for next use.

Careful handling of the tube should allow you to use it for around 7 days and up to 2 weeks. Please note the baby nasogastric feeding tubes are not manufactured for use in this way. If you notice signs of wear and tear or changes in the colour and texture of the tube, please throw it away.

Further support

Please review your feeding and feeding plan with your local infant feeding support service after one week.

Sharing your information

King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has partnered with Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust through the King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas' hospitals. King's College Hospital and Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trusts share an electronic patient record system, which means information about your health record can be accessed safely and securely by health and care staff at both Trusts. For more information visit www.kch.nhs.uk.

Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: 020 3299 3601

Email: kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent BR6 8ND

Tel: 01689 863252

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If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Communications and Interpreting telephone line on 020 3299 4826 or email kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net