

How to teach your 6-month-old child to drink from a straw.

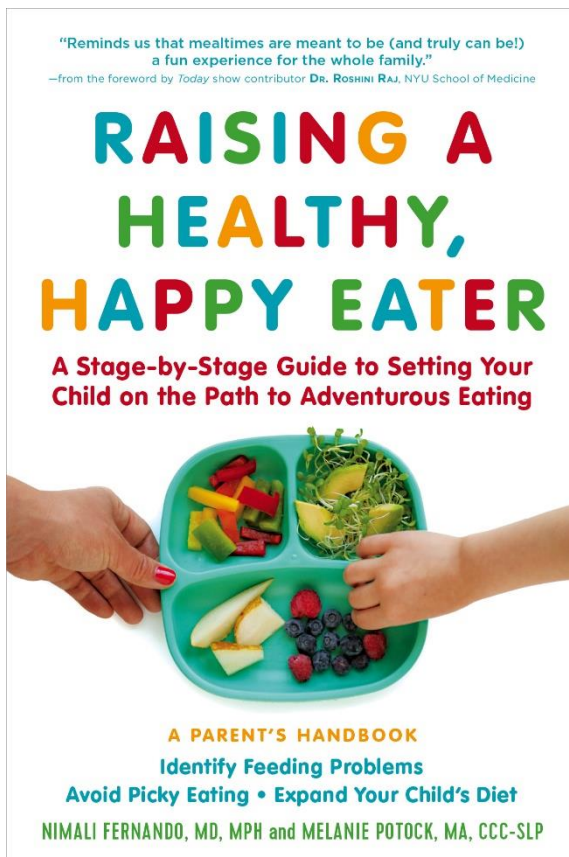
The proven method developed by Melanie Potock, MA, CCC-SLP

(If your toddler is having trouble with straw drinking, these steps will help too!)

1. Open a full jar of your child's favorite smooth, puréed baby food. Either homemade or store-bought is fine. Dip a short, firm-sided straw in the purée, then let the tip fill about ½-inch full, so that there is purée inside and outside the straw. Put your finger on top of the straw to prevent the purée from spilling out the bottom.
3. With your finger still on the top of the straw, place about ½ inch of the wet straw flat on your child's tongue, as if it were a **spoon** of purée.
4. Wait for your child's lips to close around the purée on the tip, let go of the top hole, and slowly draw the straw **straight out** of his mouth. The tiny bit of purée that was on the outside of the straw is now on your child's tongue, ready to be swallowed.
5. Continue with this process until your child can manage a tiny bit more purée inside the straw. Remember, the outside of the straw should have a little purée on it too to tempt his lips to close around it.
6. Once your child has mastered steps 1 through 5 (this can take a few days of practice or happen all in one day), prime the straw with the purée **two to three inches** from the bottom by sucking on the top of the straw and then putting your finger over the top hole. Be sure to dip the bottom of the straw in just a tiny bit of purée, so that when you present it again, your child feels the purée on the outside.
7. To teach the next step, the suck, the key is to leave the straw in your child's mouth one to two seconds longer. Present the straw just as you would a spoon, wait for her lips to close . . . now wait again. As soon as she begins to suck, lift your finger off the top hole so that the purée can flow. Let your child suck slowly and swallow repeatedly until the straw is empty.
8. Once your child can manage two inches with ease, prime the straw to the top (four to five inches). Let your child practice sucking all the purée through the straw, as described in Step 7.
9. Take the full jar of food (or a covered cup filled to the top with purée) and leave about one inch of straw tip sticking out above the purée. Add a dab of purée to the tip of the straw again, just to encourage the sucking action. You may need to hold the jar or cup at a 45-degree angle so that the straw enters his mouth at just the right position while he learns to suck and prime the straw on his own.

10. Now that your child has mastered drinking purées via a straw, gradually thin the purée with water to nectar consistency, and eventually, to just plain water. Congratulations! Your child can now drink any consistency through a straw!

Once your child can drink this way, it's time to **cut the straw short** enough that it extends just past the lips and barely touches the tip of the tongue resting in the mouth. Why? If the straw is too long, the tongue tip cannot elevate to the alveolar ridge – that spot where we say a /d/ sound. Between the ages of 6 and 12 months, babies are learning this new way to swallow. Spouted sippy cups and longer straws keep the tongue flat, making it push forward to suckle like a newborn, delaying feeding development. By cutting the straw shorter, so just the tip of the straw reaches the tip of the tongue resting inside the mouth, you're helping your child develop this more mature swallowing pattern.



The information above is from the award-winning

Raising a Healthy, Happy Eater: *A Parent's Handbook*

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