



The Dangers Of Prop Feeding Or Bottle Propping

Prop feeding is when a baby's bottle is propped against a pillow, rolled-up blanket or other support, rather than a carer holding their baby and a bottle for each feed.

This is dangerous for your baby and increases their risk of:

- **Choking:** When being prop fed, your baby can't control the flow of milk and the bottle will continue to flow even if your baby isn't ready to swallow. Choking can be 'silent' and if you aren't near your baby, you might not notice it.
- **Aspiration:** This is when food or drink goes into the lungs (instead of the stomach). This can make babies unwell and lead to chest infections and hospitalization. Babies are more at risk of aspiration when fed lying flat on their back (instead of upright). If you have left your baby by themselves to prop feed, you won't necessarily notice that they have choked on the milk.
- **Suffocation:** Using pillows, rolled up blankets or soft toys to support the bottle increases your baby's suffocation risk because these items can fall over your baby's face and smother them. At all times when your baby is in their cot, you should be following safe sleeping guidelines which include keeping your baby's head and face uncovered and ensuring there are no pillows, toys, cot bumpers or doonas in the cot (<https://rednose.com.au/resources/education>).
- **Ear infections:** If your baby is bottle-fed lying flat on their back, they are more prone to ear infections. This is because milk and bacteria can pool at the back of their mouth and enter the ear via the eustachian tubes. Holding your baby in an upright position during feeds reduces this risk.
- **Tooth decay:** Bottle propping can lead to tooth decay as milk can stay in your baby's mouth and combine with the saliva in your baby's mouth to create acid which damages their teeth.
- **Over feeding:** If your baby can't push the bottle out of their mouth then they have to drink all of the milk even if they don't want it. This can lead to increased risk of obesity and can cause them to vomit and/or choke on their vomit. Babies show cues which can help you to work out if they have had enough to drink, such as stopping sucking and letting the teat fall out of their mouth. If you are not holding your baby for a feed, you won't see these cues.
- **Under feeding:** If the bottle falls out of your baby's mouth before they have finished drinking it, they won't be getting the full amount of milk that they need to grow and develop.

Important:

You should always supervise your baby to keep them safe. If there is something that you need to do while bottle-feeding your baby, it is much safer to stop the feed and go back to it afterwards than to leave the bottle propped in their mouth.

If you have other children, try to involve them in feeding time by reading a book or telling them a story, asking them to draw a picture or singing some songs. It can be a way to create a special time for everyone.