Step Away From the Sippy Cup!

January 9, 2014 By [Melanie Potock MA](http://blog.asha.org/author/melanie-potuck-ma/)

Sippy Cups became all the rage in the 1980s, along with oversized shoulder pads, MC Hammer parachute pants and bangs that stood up like a water spout on top of your head.   A mechanical engineer, tired of his toddler’s trail of juice throughout the house, set out to create a spill-proof cup that would “[outsmart the child](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/11/magazine/who-made-that-sippy-cup.html?_r=0).”  Soon,  Playtex® offered a licensing deal, the rest is history and I suspect  that mechanical engineer is now comfortably retired and living in a sippy-cup mansion on a tropical island in the South Pacific.

Geez. Why didn’t I invent something like that?  I want to live in a mansion in the South Pacific. By the way,  I also missed the boat on sticky notes, Velcro® and Duct Tape®–all products I encounter on a daily basis, just like those darn sippy cups I see everywhere.  I truly shouldn’t be so bitter, though – in my professional opinion, over-use of sippy cups is keeping me employed as a [feeding specialist](http://www.mymunchbug.com/) and I should be thankful for job security.  Thank goodness for the American marketing machine – it has convinced today’s generation of parents that transitioning from breast or bottle to the sippy cup is part of the developmental process of eating.  Problem is, those sippy cups seem to linger through preschool.

As an SLP [who treats babies](http://824.479.myftpupload.com/2013/12/05/all-i-want-for-christmas-is-my-g-tube-out/) with feeding challenges, I frequently hear from parents how excited they are to begin teaching their baby to use a sippy cup.  They often view it as a developmental milestone, when in fact it was invented simply to keep the floor clean and was never designed for developing oral motor skills.  Sippy cups were invented for *parents*, not for kids.  The next transition from breast and/or bottle is to learn to drink from an open cup held by an adult in order to limit spills or to learn to drink from a [straw cup](http://www.playtexbaby.com/CupsMealtime/Lil-Gripper/LilGripperTrainingCup).  Once a child transitions to a cup with a straw, I suggest cutting down the straw so that the child can just get his lips around it, but can’t anchor his tongue underneath it.   That’s my issue with the sippy-cup: It continues to promote the anterior-posterior movement of the tongue,  characteristic of a suckle-like pattern that infants use for breast or bottle feeding.  Sippy cups limit the child’s ability to develop a more mature swallowing pattern, especially  with continued use after the first year.  The spout blocks the tongue tip from rising up to the alveolar ridge just above the front teeth and forces the child to continue to push his tongue forward and back as he sucks on the spout to extract the juice.

Here’s another important take-a-way on this topic:   A 2012 study by Dr. Sarah Keim of Nationwide Children’s Hospital in Columbus, Ohio [reported](http://www.msmediacenter.tv/story.php?id=440) that “a young child is rushed to a hospital every four hours in the U.S. due to an injury from a bottle, sippy cup or pacifier.”   Dr. Keim theorized that as children are just learning to walk, they are often walking with a pacifier, bottle  or sippy cup in their mouths.  One stumble and it can result in a serious injury.

Before I ever climbed onto the anti-sippy cup soap box, I let my own two kids drink from them for a short time.  I even saved their first sippy cup – I’m THAT mom who saved EVERYTHING.  If it’s too hard to let go of the idea of using a sippy cup, let the child use it for a very short time. Then, step away from the sippy cup if the child is over 10 months old or beginning to show signs of cruising the furniture.  In the near future, it will soon be time to conquer two genuine developmental milestones–mastering a mature swallow pattern and learning to walk.

**Melanie Potock, MA, CCC-SLP*,****treats children birth to teens who have difficulty eating.  She is the author of*[*Happy Mealtimes with Happy Kids*](http://www.mymunchbug.com/book/)*and the producer of the award-winning kids’ CD*[*Dancing in the Kitchen: Songs that Celebrate the Joy of Food!*](http://www.asha.org/Publications/leader/2012/120214/In-the-Limelight--Picky-Eaters-Prompt-SLPs-Brush-With-the-Grammys/)*Melanie’s two-day course on pediatric feeding is  offered for ASHA CEUs and includes both her book and CD for each attendee.  She can be reached at**Melanie@mymunchbug.com**.*