



Adding Cereal to Baby's Bottle
May be Dangerous and
Will Not Help Baby Sleep Through the Night!

Courtesy of Wholesomebabyfood.com

Updated 06 November 2007

Cereal in a Bottle for Baby Will Not Make Baby Sleep Longer - It may make baby over eat!

First let us state that adding cereal to the bottle for an infant who has reflux is entirely different than adding cereal just to try and gain a few more minutes of sleep!

We know that many parents are offered this advice and we know that many are probably tempted to try the old "cereal in the bottle" trick to gain an extra 1-hour (heck even an extra 20 minutes!) of sleep. We also know that this is one of the biggest and possibly one of the most dangerous practices you could engage in. It is not a good idea because you may throw the "Im full" instinct off kilter but more importantly, babies have been known to aspirate cereal from the bottle. Babies who are younger than 4-6 months old seldom know how to properly swallow anything other than breast milk or formula. Inhaling a bottle with cereal in it may have deadly consequences.

Why does it seem that adding cereal to a bottle makes a baby sleep longer?

One explanation that our pediatrician gave was that about the time parents begin to try the cereal in the bottle trick is just about the time that an infant may be sleeping for longer periods at a time. This is a natural progression as baby ages and it oftentimes coincides with the addition of cereal to the bottle. This coincidence perpetuates the dangerous myth that cereal in a bottle does indeed help an infant sleep through the night. To further this explanation, let us recall that between 6-8 months old, baby is often back to waking at night for a feeding. By this time baby should be eating solids and it appears that those solids are no longer helping baby sleep through the night. In reality, baby is hitting another growth spurt and may wake again during the night for more feedings regardless of eating solids!

We think that this statement, by Jan Barger, a certified lactation consultant, pretty much sums it up

"The next time someone tells you to "just give the baby a little cereal to get him to sleep better," ask what she would recommend for an adult who can't sleep. Chances are, her advice would be to drink a glass of warm milk."

Please read through the advice and studies from medical authorities below:

"We studied whether feeding infants rice cereal before bedtime promotes their sleeping through the night. One hundred six infants were randomly assigned to begin bedtime cereal feeding (1 tablespoon per ounce in a bottle) at 5 weeks or at 4 months of age. Caretakers recorded the infant's sleep from age 4 to 21 weeks for one 24-hour period per week. Sleeping through the night was defined as sleeping at least 8 consecutive hours, with the majority of time being between the hours of midnight and 6 AM. The results were also reviewed changing the requirement from 8 hours to 6 hours." [Infant sleep and bedtime cereal](#) - [Macknin ML](#), [Medendorp SV](#), [Maier MC](#). Department of Pediatrics, Cleveland Clinic Foundation, OH 44195-5045.

"There was no statistically significant trend or a consistent tendency of one group to have a higher proportion of sleepers than the other. Therefore, feeding infants rice cereal in the bottle before bedtime does not appear to make much difference in their sleeping through the night." [NIH Medical Library - Study on Infant Sleep & Bedtime Cereal](#).

Should I put cereal in the bottle to help my baby sleep through the night?

"Cereal does not usually need to be put in your baby's bottle unless your baby's doctor specifically suggests it. Despite popular belief, adding cereal or other solid foods to your baby's diet will not help your baby sleep through the night. Your baby may have a hard time learning to eat from a spoon, if she gets used to taking solid foods in a bottle. Giving cereal before 4 to 6 months may also increase the risk of food allergies." [Harvard Medical School - 2 Month Old Baby Care](#).

Q: Will cereal in the bottle before bed help my baby sleep through the night? Does feeding before bed help a baby sleep through the night?

"No to both questions. First: No, it is usually a bad idea to put cereal in the bottle before bed. This may lead to children waking up at night with gas and stools. It may also lead to a baby learning to become dependant on having a "full belly" to fall asleep. Also, cereal is only "empty calories" for babies under 4 to 6 months old, with little nutritional value except in older babies. Second, feeding before bed usually does not help a child sleep though the night (at least, in most babies over two or three months old.) Feeding to sleep can lead to dentition, so called bottle caries. Maybe sometimes feeding before bed helps a baby under two or three months old sleep through the night, but it often leads to problems as listed above. For older babies it rarely helps them sleep through the night, and often leads to dependence on feeding before bed that can lead to tooth decay, obesity, and sleep problems that begin at nine to twelve months of life. In short, when kids get in the habit of feeding to sleep, it's very hard to break them of that habit. Also, feeding with a bottle in bed can lead to recurrent ear infections." [Pine Street Pediatrics - FormulaFAQ.htm](#)

Does adding cereal to a baby's formula help them sleep through the night?

"I do not recommend adding cereal to the formula. Sleeping though the night is not just a matter of filling up. Little stomachs can only hold so much. Adding cereal to formula makes each feeding less nutritious in terms of calcium, other minerals, fats, and protein. Feed your formula-fed infant all the formula she needs to satisfy her. She will sleep through the night when she is ready. (About half the bottle-fed infants are sleeping through the night at 8 weeks; half are not. Breast-fed infants normally wake for middle-of-the-night feedings for quite a while longer.)" [Your New Baby & Sleep; MSNBC](#).

Cereal in the Bottle may lead to overeating!

"I'm much more concerned about a subtler issue. Babies are born with a wonderful mechanism for knowing how much food they need. During the early months, they take their cues from the volume of what they drink. Adding cereal derails this mechanism. It forces them to take in deceptively large amounts of calories. It teaches them to overeat." [Dr. Greene on Cereal in the Bottle for Sleep](#).

Resources and Learning More:

[Pine Street Pediatrics - FormulaFAQ.htm](#)

[Harvard Medical School - 2 Month Old Baby Care](#)

[NIH Medical Library - Study on Infant Sleep & Bedtime Cereal](#)

[Your New Baby & Sleep; MSNBC](#)

[Dr. Greene on Cereal in the Bottle for Sleep](#)