

When Baby Bites

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Will I need to wean when baby gets teeth?

Many people think that when baby gets teeth and has the ability to bite, then the nursing relationship has ended and it's time to wean. Not true! If your baby is nursing properly, then you should not feel teeth, even if baby has a mouthful of them. And keep in mind that it's physically impossible for baby to nurse and bite at the same time, because the tongue covers the bottom teeth/gum when baby is nursing.

Some babies never bite, but biting is a behavior that most babies do try, usually when they are teething. Rest assured that biting can be stopped with a little persistence on the mother's part. Biting is, for the vast majority of moms, a temporary issue that only lasts a few days to a couple of weeks.

All babies are different, so you may need to try several different things before you find something that works for you. What works for you will depend on your baby's age, temperament and personality.

Many mothers have gotten through this stage and gone on to give their babies the wonderful [benefits of breastfeeding](#) for weeks, months, and even years afterward.

Ways to PREVENT biting

1. **Biting at the end of a nursing session:** Biting often takes place at the end of a nursing session when baby is getting bored and is no longer hungry. If you start to have a biting problem, watch for signs of boredom, and take baby from the breast before the biting starts. Also, watch for tension in baby's jaw before he starts to bite down. He may also pull his tongue back from it's normal position over the lower gum/teeth.

2. **When baby is teething:** Biting can also be brought on by teething. If baby seems to be teething rather than wanting to nurse, offer her a teething toy or something cold to bite (instead of you). Offer baby a teething toy after a bite or “near miss.” When you do this, tell her, “This is for biting. Be gentle when you nurse.” See also these [comfort measures for teething](#).

When my oldest was teething, I could tell whether my baby felt like biting or nursing by offering her a finger (careful!) or a toy before nursing – she would either suck or bite.

1. **Biting at the beginning of a nursing session:** If baby is biting at the beginning of a nursing session, make sure baby [opens wide when latching on](#). If your teething baby is biting at the beginning of a nursing session, try giving her a teething toy or something cold to chew on before nursing. Praise baby when she latches on correctly, without biting.
2. **Distracted baby:** When baby is [distracted](#), don't force a nursing. If he's wriggling, rolling, or pushing against you with his arms, he may not be hungry or interested in nursing. Try lying down with him in a quiet room, walking or rocking. See also these [tips for nursing distracted babies](#).
3. **Biting for attention:** Focus your attention on your baby while nursing, if you're having a problem with biting. Some older babies will bite for attention. Paying attention will also help you to be aware of when baby is about to bite.

Use positive reinforcement and praise for good latch on and careful unlatching. Even the youngest babies can learn to nurse properly when mom uses gentle encouragement.

What do I do if baby bites me?

If baby bites, it can be very effective to calmly remove baby from the breast and say *nothing* (or perhaps make a calm comment like “oh? don't want to nurse right now?”), then end the nursing session for a bit.

Stopping the nursing session is generally the most effective way to teach baby that nursing and biting do not go together. Once baby lets go, remove her from the breast for a bit – it may be a few seconds or a few minutes (this is something where you'll need to gauge your own baby's reaction). If baby is [teething](#) (which is often the cause of biting), this is a good time to hand baby something cold to chew on, a teething toy, etc. You might tell baby something along the lines of, “if you want to bite, we're not nursing.” If baby really wants to keep nursing, she may get upset when you end the nursing session, at which point you can wait a few moments then give baby another chance to nurse. If baby is not interested in nursing, she might fuss a few seconds but then go on to something else.

If baby bites, it's not a good idea to scream or yell *on purpose* as a method to stop biting — there are better ways to teach baby not to bite. Sometimes, of course, it's impossible not to yell in pain if baby catches you by surprise and/or bites hard. Sometimes yelling does stop baby from biting again; *however*, some babies think it's so funny that they continue to bite for the reaction, and other babies are so scared that they go on a [nursing strike](#). The chance that this method will stop baby biting is simply not worth the problems it can cause.

If your baby bites down and doesn't let go (most let go immediately without mom doing anything), there are a couple of things you can do: First, quickly place your finger between baby's gums so you can pull away without (more) injury. If that doesn't work, pull baby TOWARD you, very close to your breast. This will make it a little hard to breathe, so baby will automatically let go to open her mouth more and uncover her nose to breathe. A variation of this that some moms use is to gently pinch baby's nose closed for *just a second* to get her to open her mouth and release the nipple.

Suggestions from other moms

"A baby cannot suck for milk and bite simultaneously. When I start to nurse my son, I watch him intently. As soon as he stops sucking, I take him off the breast and talk to him gently for a minute before I let him resume."

"My baby had two reasons for biting: either he was not hungry or not interested in nursing – he was distracted or bored. I switch sides during a feeding or move to a different chair or position."

"What worked best for me was to be very vigilant during nursing sessions – no more reading magazines or watching TV. By watching carefully, I could tell when my son was beginning to lose interest, and I could remove him from the breast."

"My baby begin biting when I became pregnant with my second child (even before I realized I was pregnant). I'm not sure why – perhaps my milk supply had already decreased due to the pregnancy."

"The time when I yelled out in pain, it scared my daughter pretty badly (though not into a nursing strike). The few times that she bit after that, I just gritted my teeth and calmly said "no bite – that hurts Mama!" When my son tried biting, I found it was just as effective to say nothing (or perhaps make a calm comment like "oh? don't want to nurse right now?"), then calmly remove him from the breast for a bit."

"Be sure you don't use any teething gels or lotions just prior to breastfeeding, since it can numb the baby's tongue, and even your nipple & areola, making it difficult for baby to breastfeed."

"If you think your baby may have pain from the teething ask your doctor about using a baby pain reliever (like Tylenol) 1/2 hour before nursing."

Not really biting, but scraping teeth or indentations

Teeth scraping, uncomfortable latch, or indentations on your nipple tissue from the teeth is not all that uncommon. It seems to be worse for most moms right when the teeth first cut through, and before they have a chance to wear down some and become less sharp. Babies may also change their latch a bit when they get new teeth, as nursing can feel different to them with the new teeth. With time, baby will learn to nurse better with the new teeth and you won't be so aware of them. Here are some suggestions that have helped other moms:

- With an older baby, the weight of the baby can cause baby's mouth and teeth to "drag down" on the breast tissue. See if you can position baby so that her weight is supported well. Use pillows or a chair with arm rests to support her as much as you can. When she is nursing on the left side, bring her bottom in a little bit closer and vice versa. Don't let her nurse in a position that lets her weight and gravity cause her mouth to pull down on your breast and nipple. Try moving her body slightly in different ways (higher, lower, side to side, etc.) till the pressure on your breast is lessened.
- Latch baby on and position her head so that it is tilted back more to get the pressure of the top teeth off your breast. For example, if baby is nursing in the cradle position on the left side, bring her body toward the right a bit. This will bring baby's chin up, with her head a bit cocked back, and that moves the pressure of baby's top teeth off the top of the nipple. Don't let her chin rest on her chest.
- Some other ways to get baby's head tilted back more: ask your child to look at you while she nurses, or hold a book up high to read to your child and have her look at the book.
- When you support your breast with 2-4 fingers underneath and thumb on top, push in against the chest wall with your index finger just before offering the breast. This will cause the nipple and areola to point down more, so that they don't rub against baby's upper teeth. This technique is often suggested for moms who have nipple soreness due to their nipples rubbing up against the roof of baby's mouth.
- Ask baby to open WIDE and show her with your own mouth. Tell her that it hurts mommy and ask her to try again until it feels better.
- A generous application of lanolin before and after feeding may be helpful, as will rinsing your nipples with cool water after feedings. When babies are teething they produce more saliva which can be irritating to nipple tissue. If baby is eating solids, sometimes food particles left in the mouth can also irritate nipple tissue, so it may help to rinse out baby's mouth or give baby a sip of water prior to nursing.
- Any time you experience soreness, go back to the [basics of latch](#) just as you did in the early days.
- It's also possible that some of the tenderness is a result of ovulation or an impending menstrual period. Many moms of older babies are more bothered with latch on and baby's teeth during these times.

See also:

- [Toddler's teeth rub nipple](#), Q&A by Debbie Donovan, IBCLC
- [Toddler Tips: Uncomfortable Latch](#) from the LLLI website

If your baby bites you and causes damage to the nipple...

It never happens to most moms, but occasionally a mom will get a bad bite from baby. Applying ice right after the injury and between feedings can be very helpful. Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) are [compatible with breastfeeding](#) and can be used as needed. See [Healing broken skin in the nipple area](#) for additional information on healing.

More information

[FAQ on Biting](#) from La Leche League

[Articles on Biting and Teething](#) from *New Beginnings*

[Teething and Biting](#) from Breastfeedingbasics.com