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*Teaching Straw Drinking*  
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When it comes to choosing a cup for your baby or toddler, the selection can be quite overwhelming. My first choice, as a therapist, is an open cup. Using an open cup helps children to develop their self-care skills, as well as bilateral coordination to hold and control the cup for drinking. Orally, an open cup promotes the use of a mature drinking pattern which is very different from the motor pattern used to drink from a bottle or a sippy cup. With that, as a parent I understand the need for something spill-proof and on-the-go, and highly recommend straw drinking. Straw drinking not only helps to strengthen oral muscles, it requires the understanding and use of a more complex motor plan for drinking. Most babies are capable of being taught to use a straw between 9-12 months of age, and toddlers will typically figure it out on their own by the age of two.

When teaching your child to drink from a straw, begin by introducing them to a regular straw before introducing a spill-proof straw cup.

- Take the regular straw and place it into a cup of milk/water so it touches the bottom of the cup.
- Use your index finger to cap the opening of the straw to “hold” the liquid in the straw.
- With your baby sitting firmly in a chair, hold the straw up over their open mouth and release the liquid so it falls into their mouth, being careful not to allow too much water to go in at a time.

If your child is interested, present the straw several times. Once your child is closing his/her mouth around the straw, keep your finger over the other end so that your child begins to understand that they will need to suck to get the liquid. When you are comfortable with your child’s skill development, try putting the straw directly into the cup and letting him/her take a drink. Once your child has mastered drinking from a regular straw, then they are probably ready to move to a no spill straw cup. Keep in mind that your child will have to suck harder to drink from the spill-proof straw cup, which should help to decrease taking in large amounts of liquid and coughing.