During a child’s development, your child will move from breast or bottle feeding to using a cup. At this stage, a regular cup can be introduced for drinking liquids. You may decide to use a sippy cup during this transition. A sippy cup is a plastic cup with a bill shaped spout. It can also be called a training cup.

There are two types of sippy cups. They are:

- regular sippy cup – it leaks if it is turned upside down.
- no-spill sippy cup – it does not leak when you turn it upside down. This is because the no-spill sippy cup has a valve under the spout that keeps the liquid from spilling. To drink, the child must put his lips around the spout and sucks. This sucking action is the same motion used when drinking from a bottle. As a result, your child will not learn the more mature pattern required to drink from a regular cup.

No-Spill Sippy Cup Concerns

While no-spill cups are convenient for parents and caregivers, health professionals are beginning to see more cavities and speech difficulties or delays among children who use no-spill cups. This is because children suck from these cups like baby bottles. Some concerns are:

- cavities that are caused when children suck milk, juice and other sugary drinks for hours at a time or even while they sleep. When sweet liquids are sucked or sipped frequently they make an acid that attacks the tooth enamel for 15 to 20 minutes each time. All fruit juice, sweetened tea, pop, milk and formula contain sugars.
- future speech difficulties or delays that may result when sucking from a no-spill sippy cup. Your child is not developing mature muscle movements.
- increased risk of ear infections.
- no-spill cups trap germs that become trapped in the valve making them difficult to clean thoroughly.
What to Look for in a Sippy Cup

- no valve
- a snap-on or screw-on lid with a spout
- two handles
- a base that pulls the cup upright when it tips, keeping spills to a minimum.

Drinking From a Sippy Cup

When using a sippy cup consider the following:

- wash the sippy cup thoroughly with soap and water between uses.
- if offering a sippy cup, limit how often your child drinks from it. Do not use it as a pacifier.
- when your child is thirsty between meals or at bedtime, offer water in a regular cup.
- do not let your child constantly sip liquids containing sugar, such as juice drinks and milk.
- avoid the habit of keeping it within reach while riding in a car or stroller as this may cause frequent sipping.
- do not let your child carry the sippy cup around. This may cause choking. If the child falls while drinking from a cup, the child can injure the teeth and mouth.

Once your child has learned how to sip, the sippy cup has achieved its purpose. It should be set aside and the child can use a regular cup.

For more information contact the Oral Health Program, at (306) 655-4462.