

Quarters and Quarts

When my mom drove me home, we stopped downtown. My mom said that we were lucky to find a parking place. In the city you have to put money into the parking meter when you want to leave your car. My mom always has a little plastic bottle in her car filled with coins. All the coins are the same – 25 cents each. We call them quarters. Have you seen little brownish plastic bottles with white caps that pharmacists use for pills? My mom saved one empty bottle for quarters. You see, a quarter is actually a circle. The bottom of the bottle is also a circle. And they are the same size! So the quarters make a nice tower in the bottle. When my mom needs quarters for the parking meter, she takes them from the bottle and then puts new coins in.

When I asked my dad why we call a coin of 25 cents “a quarter,” he said that one should think about numbers carefully to understand words. You see, 25 cents and 25 cents make 50 cents. Add another 25 cents and you will have 75 cents. One more 25-cent coin and you have 100 cents, which is the same as a whole dollar. So if I have four 25-cent coins I have as much money as if I had a whole paper dollar. So 25 cents is a quarter of a dollar. It is too tiresome to say “of a dollar” every time. So we just say “a quarter.”

The parking meters downtown allow us to stay 15 minutes for every quarter. My mom put in three quarters and the parking meter showed us 45 minutes ($15 + 15 + 15$.) My mom said that 15 minutes is a quarter of an hour. I guess you can say so – there are 60 minutes in an hour. 60 is $15 + 15 + 15 + 15$. Waiting four times for 15 minutes each is the same as waiting for a whole hour.

I was walking with my mom thinking about this smart parking meter – it allows a quarter of an hour for a quarter of a dollar. I remember when we visited my aunt Maddie in northern New Hampshire on her dairy farm, we did not look for a parking meter – just stopped where we liked for as long as we would like. This sounds convenient, but I know they do not have as many cars there as there are in the city. When we went to a town on a market day, we had to park at a parking meter, but there we could park for two hours for a quarter. When we were leaving, the meter still showed an hour. I guess parking meters are not the same everywhere.

My thoughts about parking meters were interrupted because my mom remembered that we needed some milk, so we went to a store. My mom is always buying these funny white bottles with milk. They look funny because they have handles, but one can see that milk is inside the handle. They call this bottle a quart. My mom says that with the right kind of cookies our family can finish a quart of milk in one sitting. This statement does not seem to make much sense. For one thing, I have never yet seen the wrong kind of cookies. They all look good to me. For another thing, you do not have to be sitting – you can drink your milk while standing. I think more cookies would fit inside that way. My mom said that four such bottles would make a gallon. I wonder why we call it a quart, not a quarter...

I would like to know who can drink a gallon of milk in one sitting (or in one standing)? May be a calf? I will ask my aunt Maddie. One of her four cows recently had a baby. How much milk does cow's baby – a calf – drink in a day?