

Beyond the First Feedings

How often should I nurse?

Newborns feed often and will give cues or signs when they are ready to feed. The length of each feeding varies and your baby will show signs when she is finished. Newborns are hungry at different times, with a long cluster of feedings in the late afternoon or night. Most breastfed newborns feed 8 to 12 or more times per 24 hours (once the milk has come in). If your baby isn't waking on her own during the first few weeks, wake her if more than 4 hours have passed since the last feeding. If you are having a hard time waking up your baby for feedings, let your pediatrician know.

What's the best feeding schedule for a breastfed baby?

Feeding schedules are different for every baby, but it's best to start nursing your baby before crying starts. Crying is a late sign of hunger. Whenever possible, use your baby's cues instead of the clock to decide when to nurse. It can be less frustrating for you and your baby if you learn your baby's early hunger cues. Frequent feedings help stimulate the breasts to produce milk more efficiently.

During a growth spurt (rapid growth), babies will want to nurse all the time. Remember, this is normal and temporary, usually lasting about 4 to 5 days. Keep on breastfeeding, and don't give any other liquids or foods.

How long does breastfeeding take?

Each baby feeds differently: some slower, some faster. Some feedings may be longer than others depending on your baby's appetite and the time of day. Some babies may be nursing even though they appear to be sleeping. While some infants nurse for only 10 minutes on one breast, it's quite common for others to stay on one side for much longer. It's generally good to allow your baby to decide when the feeding is over—he will let go and pull back when he is done.

If your baby has fallen asleep at your breast, or if you need to stop a feeding before your baby is done, gently break the suction with your finger. Do this by slipping a finger into the corner of your baby's mouth and cheek while he is still latched on. Never pull the baby off the breast without releasing the suction.

To stimulate both breasts, alternate which breast you offer first. Some women like to keep a safety pin on their bra strap to help remember. While you should try to breastfeed evenly on both sides, many babies seem to prefer one side over the other and nurse longer on that side. When this happens, the breast adapts its milk production to your baby's feedings.

How can I tell if my baby is hungry?

You will soon get to know your baby's feeding patterns. In addition, babies may want to breastfeed for reasons other than hunger. It's OK for you to offer these "comfort feedings" as another way of meeting your baby's needs.

Nearly all newborns are alert for about 2 hours after delivery and show interest in feeding right away. Let the hospital staff know that you plan to take advantage of this opportunity—it's very important to the breastfeeding process. After 2 hours, many newborns are sleepy and hard to wake for the next day or so.

While in the hospital keeping your baby with you skin to skin will make it easier for you to recognize hunger cues and also will make it easier for your baby to be alert and feed often. Watch for the early signs of hunger. This is the

time to pick your baby up, gently awaken her, check her diaper, and try to feed her. (See "Early Signs of Hunger".)

How can I tell if my baby is getting enough milk?

There are several ways you can tell whether your baby is getting enough milk. They include the following:

- Your baby has frequent wet and dirty diapers.
- Your baby appears satisfied after feeding.
- Milk is visible during feedings (leaking or dripping).
- Your baby is gaining weight after the first 4 to 5 days of life.

Your baby should have several wet or dirty diapers each day for the first few days after delivery. Beginning around the time that your milk comes in, the wet diapers should increase to 6 or more per day. At the same time, stools should start turning green, then yellow. There should be 3 or more stools per 24 hours. Typically, once breastfeeding is going well, breastfed babies have a yellow stool during or after each feeding. As your baby gets older, stools may occur less often, and after a month, may even skip a number of days. If stools are soft, and your baby is feeding and acting well, this is quite normal.

Your baby's feeding patterns are an important sign that he is feeding enough. If you add up all the feedings over the course of the day, your baby should feed at least 8 to 12 times a day. Remember, newborns feed often and will give cues or signs when they are ready to feed. The length of each feeding varies and your baby will show signs when she is finished.

When feeding well with good latch-on, the infant will suckle deeply, you will hear some swallowing, and the feeding won't be painful. The baby should appear satisfied and/or sleep until time for the next feeding. If your baby sleeps for stretches of longer than 4 hours in the first 2 weeks, wake him for a feeding. If your baby will not waken enough to eat at least 8 times per day, call your pediatrician.

Your child will be weighed at each doctor's visit. This is one of the best ways to tell how much milk your baby is getting. The AAP recommends that babies be seen for an office visit (or home visit) between 3 to 5 days of age to check on breastfeeding and baby's weight. During the first week, most infants lose several ounces of weight, but they should be back up to their birth weight by the end of the second week. Once your milk supply is established, your baby should gain between ½ and 1 ounce per day during the first 3 months.

Breastfeeding: A Natural Gift

Breast milk gives your baby more than just good nutrition. It also provides important substances to fight infection. Breastfeeding has medical and psychological benefits for both of you. For many mothers and babies, breastfeeding goes smoothly from the start. For others, it takes a little time and several attempts to get the process going effectively. Like anything new, breastfeeding takes some practice. This is perfectly normal. If you need help, ask the doctors and nurses while you are still in the hospital, your pediatrician, a lactation specialist, or a breastfeeding support group.

For more information about breastfeeding, read the AAP book *New Mother's Guide to Breastfeeding*.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

Illustrations by Anthony Alex LeTourneau.

American Academy
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

American Academy of Pediatrics
Web site—www.HealthyChildren.org

Copyright © 2005
American Academy of Pediatrics, Updated 8/2012
All rights reserved.