

Knowing When to Feed Your Baby



“Responsive Feeding” or “Feeding-on-demand” is one of the steps to “successful breastfeeding”. “Feeding-on-demand” means that you start feeding your baby when he is hungry and that you don’t limit breastfeeding times. It is therefore important to know when your baby is hungry. In this handout I will explain different ways in which your baby tells you that he wants to be fed.

When you ask expecting and new parents how they will know that their baby is hungry, many will say: “The baby will cry when he is hungry”. However, your baby does not need to cry to tell you that he is hungry. Crying is the last hunger cue. It is best not to wait until baby cries before offering the breast. Try to look for the early feeding cues:

1. Awakening.
2. Soft sounds.
3. Licking lips, sticking tongue out.
4. Sucking on hand or finger.
5. Turning the head and opening the mouth in search for the breast.
6. Crying, beginning softly and gradually growing in intensity.



Don’t just look at the baby’s mouth, but observe his body language as well. A hungry baby and a baby who has had too much milk both want to suck. However, their body language is different:

- Watch the hands: Are they in a fist or open? Are they near the mouth or stretched away from the face?
- Watch the eyes: Are they open and looking for eye contact, or are they closed and looking away?
- Watch the body: Curled towards you or stretched out?
- Watch the head: Turned towards you or away from you?



Watch for early feeding cues and when you think your baby is hungry, then start feeding. Feeding times of a newborn are irregular. Sometimes there is only an hour in between two feeds, other times there is more time until the next feed. Newborns feed 8-12 times a day.

Please be aware that the information provided is intended solely for general educational and informational purposes only. It is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your physician for any questions you may have regarding your medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have received in this program.

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