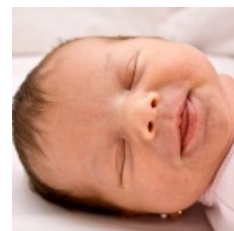




How Often To Breastfeed

"How often should I feed my baby?" is one of the most frequent questions new mothers ask. The simple answer to that question is, "As often as he's willing."

Don't wait until your baby cries to put him to the breast. Crying is a late sign of hunger. He will indicate his desire to breastfeed long before he cries by smacking his lips, making suckling motions, rooting (moving his head around in search of your breast), kicking and squirming, or looking more alert. Your baby may give you such signals as often as every hour or so in the early days after birth.



He should not go longer than about two to three hours during the day or four hours at night without a feeding. Even if you have to wake him up, be sure he receives eight to twelve feedings in every twenty-four-hour period. If he does not feed at first upon being awakened, wait half an hour, wake him up, and try again. Some babies will nurse even when they are not wide awake, so you don't have to awaken them completely.

Soon you will become familiar with your baby's feeding style—active and eager, sleepy and dreamy, or focused and intent. In the meantime, encourage him to feed as long as possible at each feeding. Keep him at your breast as long as he is actively suckling. Detaching a suckling baby from your breast before he's finished, or allowing him to fall asleep shortly after beginning to feed, may throw off the breastfeeding rhythm of supply and demand.

Allow him to breastfeed until he seems full (at this point he will probably detach from the breast all by himself). Keep in mind that the longer your baby nurses, the higher the fat content of the milk he is drinking. Shorter, timed nursing periods may not allow him the opportunity to enjoy the full benefits of your breastmilk and may leave your breasts full of unreleased milk, making you feel engorged and uncomfortable.

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