

Feeding your newborn: Tips for new parents

By Mayo Clinic staff

A newborn's feeding schedule can be unpredictable. Here's what, when and how to feed your baby.

Feeding a newborn is a round-the-clock commitment. It's also an opportunity to begin forming a bond with the newest member of your family. Consider seven tips for feeding a newborn.

1. Stick with breast milk or formula

In most cases, breast milk is the ideal food for babies. If breast-feeding isn't possible, use infant formula. Healthy newborns don't need water, juice or other fluids.

2. Feed your newborn on demand

Most newborns need eight to 12 feedings a day — about one feeding every two to three hours.

Look for early signs of hunger, such as stirring and stretching, sucking motions and lip movements. Fussing and crying are later cues. The sooner you begin each feeding, the less likely you'll need to soothe a frantic baby. When your baby stops sucking, closes his or her mouth, or turns away from the nipple or bottle, he or she might be full — or simply taking a break. Try burping your baby or waiting a minute before offering your breast or the bottle again.

As your baby gets older, he or she will take in more milk in less time at each feeding.

3. Consider vitamin D supplements

Ask your baby's doctor about vitamin D supplements for the baby, especially if you're breast-feeding. Breast milk might not provide enough vitamin D, which helps your baby absorb calcium and phosphorus — nutrients necessary for strong bones.

4. Expect variations in your newborn's eating patterns

Your newborn won't necessarily eat the same amount every day. During growth spurts — often at two to three weeks after birth and again at six weeks after birth — your newborn might take more at each feeding or want to be fed more often.

Respond to early signs of hunger, rather than keeping a strict eye on the clock.

5. Trust your instincts — and your newborn's

You might worry that your newborn isn't eating enough, but babies usually know just how much they need. Don't focus on how much, how often or how regularly your newborn eats. Instead, look for:

- Steady weight gain
- Contentment between feedings
- By the fifth day after birth, at least six wet diapers and three or more bowel movements a day

Contact the doctor if your newborn isn't gaining weight, wets fewer than six diapers a day or shows little interest in feedings.

6. Consider each feeding a time to bond with your newborn

Hold your newborn close during each feeding. Look him or her in the eye. Speak with a gentle voice. Use each feeding as an opportunity to build your newborn's sense of security, trust and comfort.

7. Know when to ask for help

If you're having trouble breast-feeding, if feedings are painful, or if baby is not gaining weight, call your lactation counselor.

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