



## **RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF HUNGER**

Newborns rely on their mothers to read their hunger signs. Your baby may demonstrate signs of hunger for up to 30 minutes before he actually begins to cry. These hunger cues may include fussing, sucking on his fingers or fist, brushing his hand across his face, making little sucking motions, or rooting--turning his head and opening his mouth as if searching for the nipple. It is important to read his hunger cues before he becomes too frustrated and upset to latch on properly. If you happen to miss these hunger cues, you will soon hear his hunger cry--his only other means of communication. Responding to your baby's cues, the subtle ones as well as the cries, will allow him to develop a sense of trust in others, and knowing that he can influence his world will help him begin to build his own self-confidence. Even if at times you are unable to soothe your baby, continuing to try to comfort him will give him a sense that people care about how he feels and are there for him.

### **REQUEST FEEDINGS**

Once your mature milk comes in, usually about three to four days after birth, it is important to follow your baby's lead and feed him on request. This means tuning into your baby's hunger cues and nursing him as often as he indicates signs of hunger or the need for comfort. During the first few days at home, some babies may nurse often and well, while others may be more interested in sleeping.

In general, once your mature milk comes in, your baby should request to nurse at least every two to three hours, or approximately eight to twelve times in a 24-hour period. Some babies will nurse more often than this! Feeding your baby when he shows signs of hunger will allow him to learn to satisfy his own appetite. Keep in mind, breast milk is easily digested, and as with all of us, babies' appetites vary from day to day.

During the early weeks of nursing, your baby may not show signs of hunger at the predictable two-or three-hour intervals that some new parents expect. Your baby may want to nurse more often at certain times of the day (typically during the evening) and may go longer between feedings at other times. This nursing pattern is called cluster feeding and is actually a very common pattern for most breastfeeding babies. Keep in mind that the length of feedings as well as the intervals between feedings vary from baby to baby. Breastfed babies may nurse as often as every hour or as infrequently as every three to four hours, and still be healthy and thrive. It is more important to focus on the entire number of feedings in a 24-hour period, than the intervals between feedings. Remember, the best indicator of whether or not your baby is getting enough nourishment from breast milk is to check the amount of wet and soiled diapers and weight gain.

Be careful not to interpret your baby's desire to nurse more often as a sign that your milk supply is inadequate. It is completely normal for your baby to nurse very often at certain times of the day during the first few weeks. Most babies who nurse irregularly in the beginning naturally begin to go longer between feedings and develop more regular feeding patterns as their digestive systems mature and they become more efficient at extracting milk from the breast.

Remember, too, that babies nurse for comfort as well as food. It is perfectly fine to nurse your baby if he seems fussy, even if it has been only 10 to 20 minutes since he last nursed. During these early days, nursing offers your newborn a great source of peace and security when he becomes overwhelmed with his new environment.

### **NIGHTTIME FEEDINGS**

While most newborns sleep an average of 14 to 18 hours in a 24-hour period, in the early days they haven't quite figured out what makes night different from day. It may take a few weeks before your baby begins to have longer stretches of sleep at night.

To make nighttime feedings easier during these early weeks, have your newborn sleep in a cradle or bassinet next to your bed, or tuck him in bed beside you. If you choose to have your baby in your bed, there is no need to worry about rolling over on him. Under normal, healthy conditions, mothers can sense their babies' presence--even while sleeping. Place your baby between you and the wall or a guardrail so that he is safely and securely on the bed. Just make sure that he cannot become trapped between the mattress and wall or guardrail. Never allow your baby to sleep on a waterbed or with soft pillows, stuffed animals, or comforters, as your newborn's neck muscles are not yet strong enough to lift his own head if it becomes buried and he is unable to breathe.

If your baby is not waking on his own to nurse at night, it is necessary to awaken him for feedings. During the early weeks, if your newborn has more than one four- to five-hour stretch of sleep in a 24-hour period, it is important to wake him and offer him a feeding. It is quite normal that he may want to nurse more often during the next few hours to make up for the missed feeding. With time, as your baby's tummy grows and his nursing pattern becomes more regular, he will begin to sleep for longer stretches at night--and so will you!

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## **ELAINE MORAN, BA, CLC**

Elaine Moran is a trained volunteer counselor for the Nursing Mothers Counsel, Inc. She recently completed the Lactation Counselor Certificate Training Program offered by The Healthy Children 2000 Project and is now a Certified Lactation Counselor, as well as a veteran breastfeeding mom and creator of Bon Appetit, Baby! The Breastfeeding Kit.

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### **Health Information Provided by Women's Health Specialists**

7800 Wolf Trail Cove, Germantown, TN 38138, (901) 682-9222, [www.whsobbgn.com](http://www.whsobbgn.com)

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