

# FREQUENCY AND DURATION OF FEEDINGS

## HOW OFTEN? HOW MUCH?

Some important things to remember: Normal newborns can be irregular eaters. The frequency they will want to eat and the length of their feedings can sometimes vary considerably. All the times given here are estimates, and will range from baby to baby, and from day to day.

### When to Feed / How Often?

Feed on Demand: We strongly recommend feeding your baby on demand, anytime he is hungry. If you nurse at the early cues, baby is patient and cooperative as you work on proper positioning. Also, baby's stomach is as small as his fist, and breastmilk digests easily, so newborns *need* to eat frequently.

Hunger Cues: How do you know if your baby is hungry? A common saying is “watch the baby, not the clock.” Feed him when he begins to show any of these signs or symptoms of hunger.

- Rooting: If you stroke his cheek, he turns toward your finger, and opens his mouth.
- Turning his head side to side, or bobbing his head up and down against your chest.
- Bringing hands to mouth. Sucking his fingers or anything he can reach.
- Lip smacking, thrusting his tongue out.
- Becoming more active after a quiet time, waving hands about, making noise.
- For a sleepy baby, cues may be subtle: you may just see fluttering eyelids and some motion.

Babies begin to show these cues about 15 minutes before they begin to cry. Crying is a late hunger cue! And it can be hard to feed a crying baby, so if you wait till he's this hungry, then you may need to work to calm him down enough to feed.

Frequency of Feeding: Feed your baby whenever he is hungry. This should be a *minimum* of 8 – 12 times in a 24 hour period. Some newborns will eat 15 or more times a day.

Babies do not necessarily space their feedings out evenly throughout the day. They may have parts of the day where they nurse as much as every hour, and other times when feedings are more spread out. The longest a newborn should go without feeding is three hours in the daytime, or four hours overnight. All newborns need to be fed during the night.

If you have an unusually sleepy baby who does not ask to be fed this often, keep him near you.

Whenever he stirs at all, change his diaper, and nurse him. See PCN page 434 for more ideas.

As baby gets older, feeding times become less frequent and more predictable. Most three month old babies go approximately 3 hours between feedings.

### How much to feed:

Feed the baby until he acts full: he may fall asleep, or he may let go of the breast. Or, his sucking pattern will slow down until he is pausing more often than sucking.

At first, expect it to take 20 – 45 minutes per feeding. This time will get shorter as you and baby both get more experienced. You should always nurse a newborn for *at least* 10 minutes on the first side, then as long as baby desires on the second side.

Again, as baby gets older, he will become more efficient at feeding, and it will take less time.