

Hunger Cues - When do I feed baby?

Babies should be fed when they indicate hunger. Crying is a late indicator of hunger - breastfeeding is much easier for both mom and baby if mom is able to pick up on baby's earlier hunger cues.

Common infant hunger cues include:

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| <i>Early</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased alertness• Smacking or licking lips• Opening and closing mouth• Sucking on lips, tongue, hands, fingers, toes, toys, or clothing |
| <i>Active</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rooting around on the chest of whoever is carrying him• Trying to position for nursing, either by lying back or pulling on your clothes• Fidgeting or squirming around a lot• Hitting you on the arm or chest repeatedly• Fussing or breathing fast |
| <i>Late</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moving head frantically from side to side• Crying |

“My newborn wants to sleep all the time! Should I wake him to breastfeed?”

Yes, if he does not wake on his own. Many newborns are very sleepy in the early days or weeks and may not exhibit hunger cues as often as they actually need to eat. Newborns should be nursed anytime they cue hunger, but *at least every 2 hours* during the day and at least once during the night. Once your baby has established a good weight gain pattern (at least 4-5 ounces per week, for babies under 4 months), you can stop waking baby to nurse and let him set his own pattern.

“My baby just started sleeping longer at night. Do I need to wake him to nurse?”

If your baby is younger than 4 weeks, then it is a good idea to wake baby at least every 4-5 hours at night to nurse if he does not wake on his own. If your child is older than 4 weeks, you can allow baby to sleep as long as he wants at night as long as he is peeing, pooping, and gaining weight within normal parameters.

“My baby frequently sucks on his hands. Does this always mean that he’s hungry?”

After the newborn period, hand sucking is not as reliable an indicator of hunger. Starting at around 6-8 weeks, baby will begin to gain more control over his hands and will soon begin to explore his hands and everything else using his mouth. It is also common for babies to suck on their hands when their gums become tender in preparation for tooth eruption. Symptoms of teething can sometimes occur weeks and even months before the first tooth erupts.

“During the early weeks of breastfeeding, mothers should be encouraged to have 8 to 12 feedings at the breast every 24 hours, offering the breast whenever the infant shows early signs of hunger such as increased alertness, physical activity, mouthing, or rooting. Crying is a late indicator of hunger.”

-- From the American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement:
Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk (February 2005)

For more information and internet resources, see <http://www.kellymom.com/bf/start/>