

Breastfeeding Your Early-term Baby

Breastfeeding

Early-term babies (born at 37, 38 or 39 weeks) can have extra breastfeeding needs.

After birth, it may seem that your baby is breastfeeding well. But once you get home, your baby may start to act sleepy and not seem interested in feeding. This often happens because your baby's brain has not matured enough to help him or her to stay awake and have enough energy to nurse for a full feeding.

Feeding is the last function to mature. This is why it is important to watch your baby for signs of getting enough breastmilk.

Feeding Cues

Your baby will give you cues when he or she is hungry:

- roots or turns his or her head when his or her cheek is stroked
- opens his or her mouth and searches
- smacks his or her lips
- makes sucking movements
- puts his or her hand in his or her mouth
- moves his or her body in a way that looks like squirming
- cries (the last cue).

Your baby needs to feed every 2 to 3 hours. As your milk volume increases over the first week, you will hear more swallowing.

Once your baby starts taking more milk at each feeding, he or she may feed every 3 hours instead of every 2 hours.

Your goal is to hear a rhythmic suck-swallow pattern for at least 10 to 15 minutes on each breast. Always offer the second breast at each feeding.

Waking a Sleepy Baby

If your baby is not waking to feed, try the following suggestions to wake your baby or keep him or her awake.

- Undress your baby from his or her blanket or remove the clothing except for the diaper.
- Before breastfeeding, cuddle skin-to-skin with your baby by placing him or her on your chest. Make sure your baby's arms and legs are outstretched.
- Express some colostrum or breastmilk onto your baby's lips.
- Do breast compression while your baby is latched but not actively sucking. Talk with a lactation consultant if you need to learn how to do breast compression.
- Sing or talk to your baby.
- Dress your baby and place your baby in his or her crib after trying to feed.

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How to Tell if Your Baby is Getting Enough Breastmilk

In general, you can tell if your baby is getting enough breastmilk if your:

- baby has bursts of sucking and swallowing
- breast feels softer after a feeding
- baby appears satisfied and doesn't cry for more breastmilk shortly after feeding
- baby has wet diapers that look clear yellow and not dark yellow. After the first week your baby should have at least 6 wet diapers a day.
- baby's stools change in color and consistency during the first week:
 - Days 1 to 2: your baby passes meconium. Meconium is your baby's first stool. It will be black and tarry. This is normal.
 - Days 2 to 4: the stools will become less sticky, lighter in color and more liquid.
 - Days 3 to 5: the stools will be green-yellow to mustard-yellow, seedy and liquid.
 - Days 5 and on: the stools will be mustard-yellow, seedy and liquid.
- baby regains his or her birth weight in 10 to 14 days.

Feeding Plan

Before you leave the hospital, talk with your lactation consultant or nurse about a feeding plan for your baby.

If you need to give your baby supplemental feedings, talk about your options with your lactation consultant or nurse. Together, you both will decide which options are best for your baby.

Options for feeding a supplement to a breastfed baby include:

- cup or spoon feeding
- bottle feeding
- feeding tube device
- finger feeding.

You can also talk about how much expressed breastmilk or formula your baby needs at each feeding.

Sample feeding plan 1

- Breastfeed your baby every 2 to 3 hours.
- Continue with this plan if you hear swallowing and there are signs that your baby is getting enough breastmilk.

Sample feeding plan 2

If your baby is having trouble latching on or is sleepy:

- Try to breastfeed for up to 15 minutes.
- If your baby is not successful with an effective latch, use a breast pump. Pump both breasts for 10 to 15 minutes. Give your baby this breastmilk. Use the feeding method that works the best for your baby.
- Offer your breastmilk first. If you are not able to get enough breastmilk while pumping, you can give your baby formula until your own supply increases.

Once your baby starts gaining weight, has more energy, and is taking more milk at your breast, your feeding plan will change.

Whom To Call With Questions

If you have questions or concerns about your baby's health, talk with your baby's health care provider.

If you have questions or concerns about breastfeeding, talk with your lactation consultant or your nurse.