

Healthy Feeding from the Start for Expectant Families

A new baby can be very exciting but also overwhelming. Knowing what to expect once your baby arrives can be helpful. Thinking about these questions before your baby is born can help you start healthy feeding habits from the beginning:

- Do you plan to bottle feed or breastfeed/chestfeed?
- How will your baby tell you they are hungry?
- When can they start trying solid foods?

Your baby will rely on you to nourish them so that they grow healthy and strong. As their parent, you are their most important teacher of healthy eating habits. You can nurture their understanding of their body's signs of hunger and fullness. Feeding your baby is also an opportunity to get to know each other and bond.



What is responsive feeding?

Responsive feeding divides the responsibility for meals and snacks between the adult and the child. Adults provide a safe and nurturing feeding environment that responds to the child's signs of hunger and fullness. Adults offer healthy meals and snacks in serving sizes that are right for the child's age. The child decides whether to eat, which foods, and how much to eat.

Feeding on Demand

In the early months, you need to feed your baby on demand. This means they can feed whenever they are hungry and stop when they are full. Hunger signs are unique to each baby. Here are some examples of how your baby can show they are hungry:

- Have a specific hunger cry
- Root or look around for food
- Suck on their hand or fingers
- Become irritable or restless
- Repeat a behavior to show hunger

When your baby is full, they may:

- Close their mouth
- Turn their head away from the breast or bottle
- Become drowsy or fall asleep
- Fidget or get distracted
- Use hand motions or make sounds to let you know they are full

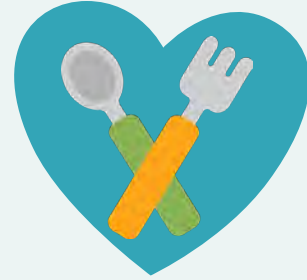


Responding to your baby's hunger and fullness signs helps you know how much food they want and when they're full. This way of feeding supports healthy eating habits, growth, and development. Knowing your baby's signs of hunger and fullness helps you support healthy eating habits when they are ready to start solid foods.

Why is responsive feeding important?

Responsive feeding:

- Helps your baby learn to listen to their body's hunger and fullness signals
- Develops self-control over how much food they will eat
- Teaches feeding skills such as picking up food or using utensils
- Encourages taking part in meal and snack times
- Helps them communicate their need for food



Responsive feeding gives your child the opportunity to notice, understand, and trust their bodies' cues. This helps to build the skills they need to make healthy choices about food as they grow.

What can you do?

Use the tips below to promote healthy feeding.

- Learn your baby's signals for when they are getting hungry.
- Use feedings as an opportunity to bond with your new baby. It may seem too early, but they are already learning language by listening and interacting with you.
- Eat meals as a family as often as you can. This is how your baby learns.
- Be patient. You may need to offer a new food 10 to 15 times before your child accepts it. Make sure they see you eating healthy foods too.
- You are your child's first teacher. You can use mealtimes to talk about colors and shapes. Allow them to explore textures. These are learning opportunities.
- Encourage your child to eat until they are full but no more than that. Try asking, "What does your tummy feel like? Does it have enough food, or would you like more?" Try not to worry about whether they cleaned their plate. Instead, encourage them to take small amounts.
- Make mealtimes fun. Tell your child stories from your day or your childhood or make up a silly story. They will love to hear your voice and laugh with you.

Worried about your child's feeding? Some babies have a hard time at first with sucking or feeding, so contact your health care provider right away with any questions.



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