

# San Maternity

## Has My Baby Had Enough?

Breastfeeding Information – Handout 4

Updated Jun 2023

### How often will my baby feed?

In the first 24 hours or so following birth, the baby may be quite sleepy and will need to recover. The time taken by the baby when it is breastfeeding will be minimal, as the protein and calorie-rich colostrum will meet its needs. The baby is well hydrated from being in the amniotic fluid with continual feeding from the placenta, so it will not require frequent feeds.

### Postnatal day 2-3

From approximately 24-72 hours old, the baby will become more wakeful and want to feed more frequently. The baby's thirst intensifies a few days after birth and this triggers the need to breastfeed more frequently. The mother's breast milk will change from colostrum to transitional milk with the volume of the milk slowly responding to the baby's needs. We recommend the baby receives a minimum of 6 feeds in 24 hours however most breastfed babies feed on average around 8-12 times in a 24 hour period.

How often a baby feeds can depend on many factors such as the individual physical needs and on the amount of milk available at each feed. The storage capacity for milk can vary greatly between mothers and between breasts. Most mothers will feed from both breasts but a mother with a lot of milk may only need to feed her baby from one side at a feed.

Duration between feeds may also vary. Some babies may routinely feed for example every 2-3 hours. Other babies may "cluster feed", where they feed very frequently, one feed after another, for several feeds and then have a sleep for several hours. Every mother/baby relationship is individual. Unrestricted feeding is an important factor in the establishment of successful breastfeeding. It's best to allow the baby to regulate breast milk intake.

Do not wait until your baby is crying before offering the breast, as this is often a late sign of hunger. The optimal time to feed is when baby is in a quiet, alert state, immediately after waking up. Cues the baby may give you to indicate that they are ready for a breastfeed include:

- Mouthing movements
- Sucking bedclothes
- Making hand to mouth movements
- Generally becoming restless and starting to move

### How do I know when my baby has had enough time at the breast?

It is not necessary to time feeds at the breast. Some babies require only as short a time as 10-15 minutes, whilst others may need to feed for longer. The volume a baby takes at one feed is not always related to the time spent at the breast. Before the milk comes in, you may find it useful to switch sides frequently, stimulating supply and allowing the baby to access the colostrum available in both breasts. This is also helpful when the milk is in and the breasts are softer, for example in the late evening.

When breasts are full it is suggested to begin each feed on the alternate breast. This means start with the right breast for one feed, then the left breast for the next feed. When your baby comes off the breast, consider either the first breast again or the second breast - depending on the fullness of your breast. Initially during the first few weeks, this may change at each feed as your milk volume is changing in response to your baby's needs.

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Allowing your baby's appetite to regulate your milk supply establishes a basis for the rest of your breastfeeding. As long as your nipples are comfortable and your baby is sucking, time is unimportant. Babies become more efficient at breastfeeding as they grow and the time of each breast feed generally shortens. Your breasts should be free from lumps at the end of the feed.

The following points may be helpful in guiding you on how your baby will feed once your milk has "come in":

- Initial rapid sucking by the baby triggers the "let-down" reflex. The baby will then settle into longer rhythmical sucks – a pattern of approximately 8-12 suck/swallows, then a pause of up to 30 seconds. Swallowing may be seen, felt or heard.
- This sucking will continue without prompting if the baby is well attached. There is no fixed time that this will last.
- The suck/swallow cycles will become shorter as the baby nears the end of the feed and the pauses will become longer. Some babies detach themselves automatically at this stage, but others may continue to suckle for comfort. If you wish to detach your baby from the breast, you can do this by placing your finger in the corner of the baby's mouth, breaking the suction and then easing the baby from the breast.
- You may like to change your baby's nappy at this point, waking the baby up before continuing with the feed.
- It is a good idea to feel your breast at this stage. If you think that there is more milk available in the first side, then offer this side again before offering the second side. You will learn how your breasts are draining by feeling them before, during and after the feed.
- The baby's body language changes throughout the feed. Initially, the limbs are bent, muscles tight and fists clenched. Once the baby starts to feel satisfied, muscles begin to relax and the fists unclench. The baby looks content and floppy and should then sleep for a while.

Rooming-in is encouraged from birth. It promotes bonding, enables breastfeeding on demand and allows you to get to know your baby. Separation, even to the bassinet, may cause some babies to become very distressed. Skin-to-skin contact can be very helpful to calm your baby, maintain body temperature and promote the release of hormones enabling breastfeeding. If you are having strong pain relief, become ill or need some time out, your baby may be cared for in the nursery between feeds.

Night feeding has many advantages:

- Your milk supply will be established more quickly.
- Frequent feeding day and night reduces possible breast engorgement when establishing lactation.
- Promotes quality sleep due to the release of hormones whilst breastfeeding.
- Your breasts will be more comfortable, and you will therefore sleep better.
- Early frequent feeding promotes a good milk supply.
- Reduces possible jaundice in the baby.

If attempts to breastfeed are unsuccessful, then expressing and offering colostrum helps the establishment of lactation and a more vigorous baby.

Reviewed August 2015 by Lactation Consultants: Kerry Adams, Deborah Westhoff-Glenn, Chris Hedges and Amanda McCamey, RN/RM.

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