

How Often and How Much Should Your Baby Eat?

By: Sanjeev Jain, MD, FAAP

One of the most common questions new parents have is how often their baby should eat. The best answer is surprisingly simple: in general, babies should be fed whenever they seem hungry.

How do I know when my baby is hungry?

For babies born prematurely (</English/ages-stages/baby/preemie/Pages/default.aspx>) or with certain medical conditions, scheduled feedings advised by your pediatrician are best. But for most healthy, full-term infants, parents can look to their baby rather than the clock for hunger cues. This is called feeding on demand, or responsive feeding. (</English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Is-Your-Baby-Hungry-or-Full-Responsive-Feeding-Explained.aspx>)



Hunger cues

A hungry baby often will cry. But it's best to watch for hunger cues before the baby starts crying, which is a late sign of hunger and can make it hard for them to settle down and eat.

Other typical hunger cues include:

- Licking lips
- Sticking tongue out
- Rooting (moving jaw and mouth or head in search of breast)
- Putting his/her hand to mouth repeatedly
- Opening her mouth
- Fussiness
- Sucking on everything around

It is important to realize, however, that every time your baby cries or sucks it is not necessarily because he or she is hungry. Babies suck not only for hunger, but also for comfort; it can be hard at first for parents to tell the difference. Sometimes, your baby just needs to be cuddled or changed.

General Guidelines for Baby Feeding:

It is important to remember all babies are different—some like to snack more often, and others drink more at one time and go longer between feedings. However, most babies will drink more and go longer between feedings as they get bigger and their tummies can hold more milk:

- Most **newborns** eat every 2 to 3 hours, or 8 to 12 times every 24 hours. Babies might only take in half ounce per feeding for the first day or two of life, but after that will usually drink 1 to 2 ounces at each feeding. This amount increases to 2 to 3 ounces by 2 weeks of age.
- At about **2 months of age**, babies usually take 4 to 5 ounces per feeding every 3 to 4 hours.
- At **4 months**, babies usually take 4 to 6 ounces per feeding.

- At **6 months**, babies may be taking up to 8 ounces every 4 to 5 hours.

Most babies will increase the amount of formula they drink by an average of 1 ounce each month before leveling off at about 7 to 8 ounces per feeding. Solid foods (</English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Starting-Solid-Foods.aspx>) should be started at about 6 months old.

Concerns About Overfeeding or Underfeeding:

Too full?

Babies are usually pretty good at eating the right amount, but they can sometimes take in more than they need. Infants who are bottle feeding (</English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Practical-Bottle-Feeding-Tips.aspx>) may be more likely to overfeed, because drinking from a bottle may take less effort than breastfeeding. (</English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/default.aspx>)

Overfed babies can have stomach pains, gas, spit up (</English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Remedies-for-Spitty-Babies.aspx>) or vomit and be at higher risk for obesity later in life. It's better to offer less, since you can always give more if your baby wants it. This also gives babies time to realize when they're full.

If you are concerned your baby wants to eat *all the time*—even when he or she is full—talk with your pediatrician. Pacifiers (</English/ages-stages/baby/crying-colic/Pages/Pacifiers-Satisfying-Your-Babys-Needs.aspx>) may be used after feeding to help sooth healthy-weight babies who like to suck for comfort, rather than nutrition. For babies who are breastfed, it's best to wait to offer pacifiers until around 3 to 4 weeks of age, when breastfeeding is well-established.

Trouble gaining weight?

Most babies will double their birth weight by 5 months of age and triple their birth weight by their first birthday. If your baby is having trouble gaining weight, don't wait too long between feeding—even if it means waking your baby. Be sure to talk with your pediatrician about how often and how much to feed your baby.

How do I know if my baby is getting enough to eat?

Daily diapers

A newborn's diaper (</English/ages-stages/baby/diapers-clothing/Pages/Diaper-Changing-101.aspx>) is a good indicator of whether he or she is getting enough to eat. In the first few days after birth, a baby should have 2 to 3 wet diapers each day. After the first 4 to 5 days, a baby should have at least 5 to 6 wet diapers a day. Stool frequency is more variable and depends whether your baby is breast or formula fed.

Growth charts

During regular health check-ups, your pediatrician will check your baby's weight and plot it on a growth (</English/health-issues/conditions/Glands-Growth-Disorders/Pages/Growth-Charts-By-the-Numbers.aspx>) chart. (</English/health-issues/conditions/Glands-Growth-Disorders/Pages/Growth-Charts-By-the-Numbers.aspx>) Your baby's progress on the growth chart is one way to tell whether or not he or she is getting enough food. Babies who stay in healthy growth percentile ranges are *probably* getting a healthy amount of food during feedings.

Remember...

Talk with your pediatrician if you have any questions or concerns about your baby getting the right amount to eat.

Additional Information from HealthyChildren.org:

- [Making Sure Your Baby is Getting Enough Milk](/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/Making-Sure-Your-Baby-is-Getting-Enough-Milk.aspx) (</English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/Making-Sure-Your-Baby-is-Getting-Enough-Milk.aspx>)
- [Amount and Schedule of Formula Feedings](/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Amount-and-Schedule-of-Formula-Feedings.aspx) (</English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Amount-and-Schedule-of-Formula-Feedings.aspx>)
- [Is Your Baby Hungry or Full? Responsive Feeding Explained](/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Is-Your-Baby-Hungry-or-Full-Responsive-Feeding-Explained.aspx) (</English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Is-Your-Baby-Hungry-or-Full-Responsive-Feeding-Explained.aspx>) (Video)
- [Remedies for Spitty Babies](/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Remedies-for-Spitty-Babies.aspx) (</English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Remedies-for-Spitty-Babies.aspx>)
- [Breastfeeding On Demand](/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/Breastfeeding-On-Demand.aspx) (</English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/Breastfeeding-On-Demand.aspx>)
- [Ask the Pediatrician: How should we feed our baby if we're running low on money?](/English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/how-should-we-feed-our-baby-if-running-low-on-money.aspx) (</English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/how-should-we-feed-our-baby-if-running-low-on-money.aspx>)
- [Airplane Choo Choo: A Feeding Guide for Children](https://www.usdairy.com/news-articles/airplane-choo-choo) (<https://www.usdairy.com/news-articles/airplane-choo-choo>)

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