

Responsive Bottle Feeding: Understanding your baby's hunger cues

Feeding is about more than nutrition

Feeding is a wonderful opportunity for you to bond and connect with your baby – whether you're breastfeeding, mixed feeding or formula-feeding. You can foster a deep connection with your baby by holding them close and sharing skin-to-skin contact while they feed.

Creating a positive feeding environment for your baby helps them develop a secure attachment to you. Try:

- Having the same 1-2 carers or parents feeding consistently if possible.
- Feeding in a calm environment.
- Responding quickly, in a predictable way, to your baby's hunger and fullness signals.

What is responsive feeding?

Healthy infants inherently know how much food they need from the moment they're born. Responsive feeding, or baby-led feeding, allows you to react to your baby's hunger and fullness cues (verbal or physical) to determine when and how much to feed them.

Responsive feeding is about acknowledging your baby's needs, instead of implementing a strict schedule or forcing them to finish the bottle. It involves promptly responding to baby's hunger cues to prevent them from becoming overly distressed, which makes feeding difficult. It encourages your baby to communicate and bond with you, while receiving the right amount of nutrition they need to grow.

Steps in the feeding journey

1

Your baby indicates they're hungry.

- Using body movements, facial expressions or sounds.
- Signals may include: Putting their hands to their mouth, making sucking noises, touching their tummy, opening their mouth and looking around for food.



2

Recognise their cues & prepare feed.

- Respond to your baby's hunger cues as early as possible - before they begin to cry.
- Prepare a bottle following instructions on the sachet or tin.
- Check temperature and flow of formula.



This guide provides general advice only (not medical advice). For personalised recommendations and support, please consult with your healthcare provider. **BREAST MILK IS BEST FOR BABIES:** Professional advice should be followed before using an infant formula. Introducing partial bottle feeding could negatively affect breastfeeding. Good maternal nutrition is important for breastfeeding and reversing a decision not to breastfeed may be difficult. Infant formula should be used as directed. Proper use of infant formula is important to the health of the infant. Social and financial implications should be considered when selecting a method of feeding.

3

Offer baby the bottle

- Encourage your baby to open their mouth by gently brushing the teat down the middle of baby's lips.
- When offering the teat, let your baby pull it further into their mouth. Keep the bottle in a horizontal, slightly tilted

position to control the milk flow and prevent it from coming out too quickly.

- Hold your baby close, make eye contact and talk gently as they feed.



4

Your baby may want to take a break.

- Watch baby while feeding, as they naturally pause every few minutes. When they do, gently stop the milk flow by either removing or lowering the bottle. This will help you pace the feeding

and reduce the risk of overfeeding your baby.

- It is important to change sides during a feed or at every other feed. This encourages eye and head movement.



5

Your baby shows you they're full.

- Stop feeding when your baby indicates they've had enough.
- Signals may include: Crying, tensing their body, falling asleep, turning away from their bottle, closing their mouth, spitting food out, ignoring their bottle or pushing it away.



Responsive feeding at a glance

Feeding Cues

- Sucking lips, tongue or fist
- Turning head from side to side
- Fussing, crying, becoming restless
- Reaching for bottle

Fullness Cues

- Close their mouth
- Turn their head away from the bottle
- Relax their hands
- Push food away
- Fall asleep

Feeding Time

A feed can take up to one hour, but 20-30 minutes is typical for most babies

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If you wish to speak to someone about responsive feeding call our Midwife, Dietitians and Nutritionists on the Careline free on: 1800 438 500 (Australia) or 0800 438 500 (New Zealand).



REFERENCES

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