

Breastfeeding Your Sleepy Baby

Your newborn needs to nurse often—about every 2 to 3 hours. Frequent nursing gives them the nutrition needed to grow and develop. It also stimulates your breasts to make enough breast milk.

Getting in sync with your baby

Having a baby that is too sleepy to nurse is a common problem. These tips can help you manage it:

- **Keep your baby at your bedside and nurse often after 11 pm.** In the first days of life, it's normal for your baby to be sleepy during the day and more active at night. Make the most of this awake time by nursing often.
- **Watch for your baby's feeding cues, and respond right away.** Feeding cues are the signals your baby gives when ready to nurse. Some common cues to look for include:
 - Opening eyes
 - Bringing hands up to the face
 - Sucking on lips or making sucking movements with the tongue and mouth
 - Making small noises

If you notice these or any other cues, offer your breast right away. Don't wait for your baby to begin crying—babies eat best when they're calm.

- **Let your baby be in charge.** Start each feeding with the side where it is easiest for your baby to latch on and nurse. Letting your baby nurse on their favorite side rewards their early efforts to nurse and encourages them to continue. By their third or fourth day of life, they'll probably be nursing well on both sides.
- **Don't give a pacifier (binky).** Until your baby is nursing well and their stools are yellow, have them suck at your breast only—not on a pacifier.



Skin-to-skin holding is a wonderful warm-up for a breastfeeding session. Also called "kangaroo care," skin-to-skin means holding your baby so that your bare chests are touching.

When you need to wake your baby

Wake your baby to nurse if it has been 3 hours since their last feeding.

- 1 Start by unwrapping your baby from their blanket and pulling their arms out of their shirt.
- 2 Place your baby between your bare breasts (dad's bare chest will work too).
- 3 Gently rub your baby's back and talk or sing to them to see if you can wake them enough to feed them.

See more about when you need to wake up your baby and tips on timing on page 2.

If it has been 4 hours since your baby nursed, be a little more insistent. Dim the lights in the room, then try these “wake-up” techniques:

- Change their diaper and wash their bottom
- Take their shirt off
- Wash their face
- Rub and pat their back
- Tickle their feet
- Massage their elbow
- Sit them up and continue rubbing and patting their back
- Talk to your baby, and tell them what you want them to do: “It’s time to wake up. You need to eat.” The sound of your voice may help rouse them.

If your baby won’t breastfeed after 4 hours, ask your nurse for help.

Tips on timing

These additional tips can help with breastfeeding:

- **Breastfeed whenever your baby wakes up—before you change their diaper.** In the first few days of life, most babies will wake to be fed.
- **When you’re offering your breast, try for about 10 minutes before taking a break.** You want to be persistent in your breastfeeding attempts, but you also want to avoid frustration. So keep sessions short. Work with your baby for 10 minutes, then hold them skin-to-skin for half an hour before trying again.
- **After nursing on the first side for 10 to 15 minutes, burp your baby (or change the diaper) and offer them your other breast.** With luck, they’ll nurse there, too.
- **Keep track of the times you breastfeed.** In the haze of the newborn period, it’s easy to lose track of time. Write down the time of each breastfeeding session. It’s the best way to know if you’re meeting the target of feeding every 2 to 3 hours.

You can use the breastfeeding log at the back of your *Guide to Breastfeeding* booklet.

Notes

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