

# 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. If your baby refuses to eat at all, or consistently sleeps 5 to 6 hours between feedings, tell your provider.

## 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** 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.

- **Don't give a pacifier (binky).** The use of pacifiers has been linked to earlier weaning (stopping breastfeeding) and a higher risk of breastfeeding problems. If you choose to use a pacifier, wait until breastfeeding is well established (usually about 3 to 4 weeks of age) before giving one to your baby. You should not use a pacifier to space out a feeding, or if your baby is still wanting to eat. Using a pacifier can cause you to miss your sleepy baby's hunger cues.



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 their back, feet, and arms.
- Hand express a few drops of milk to rub on their lips to help interest them.
- Talk to your baby. 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 to 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.**
- **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, or keep track on a breastfeeding app. It's the best way to know if you're meeting the target of feeding every 2 to 3 hours.

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