

# Infant Feeding Cues: A Guide for Healthcare Professionals



## STEP EIGHT: ENCOURAGE BREASTFEEDING ON DEMAND.



*During the first few days of life, parents are learning to communicate with each other. This is a unique learning and bonding time. As a healthcare professional, you can help your patients be responsive to their baby's language by teaching them how to recognize and respond to their infant's cues.*

### Evidence suggests that mothers who understand infant feeding cues are:

- More confident and satisfied with the hospital care they received
- More likely to succeed with breastfeeding
- More able to calm their infants

### What are Infant Feeding Cues?

Cues are the infant's language to let us know what they need. Newborns communicate with easy-to-recognize signs that let you know when they are hungry, full, tired, need to be changed and want quiet time. Learning the infant's language is a new skill for all parents. You can help facilitate this process by teaching some common infant signs of hunger and fullness, outlined in the table below. Feeding according to these cues ensures that infants receive small amounts of colostrum or breastmilk at very frequent intervals. This is exactly what a newborn's stomach size can accommodate without uncomfortable overstretching (see image on reverse side). In addition, frequent feedings (8-12 times per 24 hours) help to prevent jaundice and hypoglycemia.

### Pacifiers

Introducing pacifiers may make it difficult for parents to recognize their baby's signs of hunger. In general, breastfed infants should not be given a pacifier, unless medically recommended, until breastfeeding is well established (typically 3 to 4 weeks).

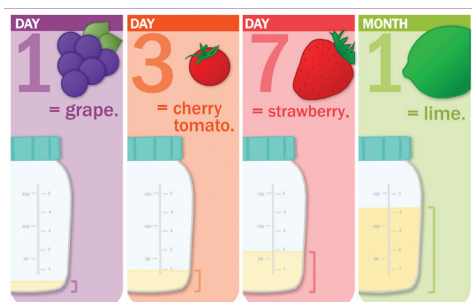
Infant Hunger Cues: Feed Me!	Infant Fullness Cues: That's Enough!
Nuzzling the breast	Relaxed position
Eye movement under closed eyelids	Slowing eating pace
Increased alertness (waking)	Stopping sucking
Sucking on hands or tongue	Turning face away from nipple
Rooting—searching for something to suck	Closing lips tightly when nipple is presented
Bringing hand to mouth	Becoming fussy
Squeaking or light fussing	Increasing attention to surroundings
Tongue thrusts	Falling asleep* (Some newborns sleep through their hunger cues and need to be aroused to feed with sufficient frequency.)
Crying is a late sign of hunger	

CONTINUED ON REVERSE...



# Infant Feeding Cues:

## A Guide for Healthcare Professionals



APPROXIMATE INFANT STOMACH CAPACITY

Day 01: 5 - 7 ml  
Day 03: 22 - 27 ml  
Day 07: 45 - 60 ml  
Day 30: 80 - 150 ml

When parents respond to their newborn's feeding cues, they build trust and a sense of security. Infants learn that their needs are going to be met. This is the one aspect of responsive feeding, which, when practiced throughout young childhood leads to optimal growth and development.

### Is crying a feeding cue?

Newborns have immature nervous systems easily overloaded by excessive activity in their surroundings, resulting in crying. When newborns are ready to eat, they will first display one or more feeding cue rather than crying. It is best to avoid waiting to start a feed until the infant is crying. Infants latch best when they are organized and alert. When crying, they are less likely to demonstrate normal feeding responses.

**Crying is a natural and normal behavior for infants. It can mean that something is making the infant uncomfortable, such as too much stimulation, a dirty diaper, or tummy pains. It can also mean that the infant needs to be close to mom or another familiar person. It is important to work with parents to help them respond effectively to their crying newborn.**

- Suggest that the baby and mom rest skin-to-skin and belly-to-belly.
- Suggest that the baby be placed close to mom, with a supported back, and arms free to move.
- Suggest that the baby may feel comforted by the mother's soothing voice.

**If the infant is still crying, suggest additional calming techniques, such as:**

- Gently rocking baby from side to side (ear to ear).
- Cocooning baby in mother's arms, holding somewhat firmly in a fetal position. Once the infant (and mother) are calm, suggest they start to nurse. Breastfeeding will calm both the infant and the mother even further. If the mother is still concerned, she may need some extra support at this time.

**Tip: Parents of low birth weight, preterm or early term babies, and newborns that are losing excess weight will need to be educated on feeding with early feeding cues. They may need to wake to feed so that the infant receives at least 8 feedings per 24 hours.**

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