



Signs your newborn's hungry and signs he's full

FIRST-TIME PARENTS

ARTICLE

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When it comes to feeding your baby, how will you know when to start and when to stop? Simple—he'll tell you.

All babies instinctively know when they're hungry and when they're full. And while in the early days you may miss a few tell-tale signs that he's ready to start or stop eating, it won't take long for you to easily recognize his cues.

Will my baby cry when he's hungry?

It's generally assumed that crying in babies, especially newborns is a sign of hunger. If he is hungry and has already started crying then this may be a late cue. He was probably giving you the signs that he was hungry before this stage. If you wait until he is crying, it can be harder to calm him down enough to latch on and breastfeed effectively.

Instead, look out for earlier cues that your baby is hungry. These include:

- rapidly moving eyes when he is initially calm and alert
- eagerly sucking on his hands
- rooting by turning his head and opening his mouth
- smacking his lips

If you don't respond to these hunger cues, it is likely he will begin to fuss and then cry.

Signs of fullness in very young babies include:

- a lack of interest in further feeding
- when he takes a burping break, he may not want to return to feeding
- he may become calm and relaxed, and often fall asleep

Babies cry for a variety of reasons

As you and your baby spend time together, you will learn his hunger and fullness cues and know the difference between his hunger cries and when he may simply be overtired, or need a diaper change.

If your baby is not showing signs of hunger, feeding is not the best first approach to soothe him. Try other calming and soothing approaches such as holding, rocking, or singing to him. He will soon show you his signs of hunger, and then it's time for feeding!

Some babies cry lots during the early weeks and can't be comforted, either by feeding or soothing. If your baby is crying inconsolably for three hours a day for three or more days a week, it might be colic. Ask your healthcare provider for advice. Your healthcare provider probably will encourage you to continue breastfeeding as breast milk contains the perfect balance of whey (a protein that's easily digested), lactose and magnesium to support a "happy" gut. You may also want to consider a probiotic such as *Lactobacillus reuteri*, which has been proven to reduce symptoms of colic.

Trust his instincts (and yours)

Why is letting your baby lead the way so important? "If you feed your baby when he signals he is hungry, and stop when he shows signs of fullness, you are providing a prompt response to his needs and are encouraging his natural ability to sense his own hunger levels," explains Dr. Lisa Fries, Ph.D., Behavioral Scientist at Nestlé Research Center in Switzerland. "This can help reduce the likelihood of his becoming over- or underweight because your baby is the one who decides how much he needs to eat. These early feeding behaviors are important, not just when he's a baby, but throughout childhood too."

In fact, recent research found that where hunger cues were misinterpreted by parents, babies gained significantly more weight between the ages of 6 and 12 months than those babies of moms who only fed them when the signs were there.

This can be especially important when feeding with a bottle. Studies found that babies only fed expressed breast milk in a bottle gained more weight than those that nursed directly from their mom. It could be that moms overly pressure babies to finish bottles of breast milk so none goes to waste, even if babies are no longer showing signs of hunger. Another study suggested that moms who encouraged their babies to finish their bottles were more likely to go on to pressure their children to eat in later years. These studies provide support for the importance of moms and babies developing good habits, early in a baby's life.

If babies are pressured to eat, it's more likely they'll be fussier eaters as they grow up. Just one more reason to start now to teach your tiny baby that you respect and attend to his hunger and fullness cues. You are teaching him healthy eating behaviors that can have long-lasting effects on his healthy growth and development!

What if his feeding habits suddenly change?

Your baby's hunger adapts to his needs. So, while there may be times when your baby seems to be eating a lot more than usual, this could simply mean he's having a growth spurt and needs the extra fuel.

Source

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