Infant Feeding: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers

As a new parent or caregiver, you probably hear a lot of advice about how to feed your baby. This booklet will give you some basic information about feeding that can help your baby get the best start in life.

Myths and Facts About Infant Feeding

• **MYTH:** In hot weather, babies need water in a bottle.
  • **FACT:** Formula or mother’s milk provides all the liquid a baby needs.

• **MYTH:** Cereal in a bottle will help my baby sleep longer.
  • **FACT:** Cereal in a bottle is bad for your baby’s sleep, and may upset her tummy. Don’t feed cereal until she can eat it from a spoon.

• **MYTH:** When a baby starts to get hungry, she’ll cry.
  • **FACT:** When a baby first gets hungry, she’ll give signs like wriggling, opening her mouth, or sticking out her tongue. Feeding before she cries will prevent crying. Crying is a late sign of hunger.

• **MYTH:** If I am too busy to feed my baby, I can just prop his bottle.
  • **FACT:** Propping a bottle is not safe. A baby can choke. Take a break from what you’re doing and enjoy this special time with your baby.
Should I schedule my baby’s feedings?

It is best to feed your baby when she is hungry. It may feel tempting to put your baby on a strict feeding schedule, so you will always know when she wants to eat. But do you always eat at exactly the same time every day?

It’s best to feed your baby in response to her changing appetites. Babies may be more or less hungry at different times or on different days—just like you! It’s best to feed according to their changing appetites.

Doctors recommend that all babies be fed in response to their hunger cues, not on a strict schedule.

Advantages of cue-feeding include:

• Babies tend to grow better, especially after 3-4 months of age.
• Babies are calm for feedings, so they feed better.
• Breastfeeding moms have an easier time making enough milk for their babies.
• Babies learn to eat when they’re hungry, which may help prevent obesity when they are older.
But how do I know when my baby wants to eat?

Your baby may not be able to speak, but he is still able to tell you what he needs.

- **When a baby is hungry**, she will open her mouth, stick out her tongue, and move her head from side-to-side. While sleeping, she may start to wriggle. If her hand is near her mouth, she may try to suck on it.

- **When a baby is full**, he will move away from the food. Never prop a bottle, because it forces a baby to eat more than he wants. It makes him overeat, and can increase vomiting. Just like adults, babies know when they have had enough.

- **When a baby wants to have some quiet time**, she will often look away. She may have changes in her skin, her movements, or her breathing.

- **When a baby wants to cuddle**, he will look at you. As he gets older, he will smile.

- **When a baby is unhappy**, she will fuss and sometimes cry. All babies do this from time to time. **You can never “spoil” a baby by comforting her.** Responding to her cries will help her feel more secure and cry less often.

*When you try to understand what your baby is “saying,” both of you will be happier and more confident.*
Even if you are not a breastfeeding mother, consider learning more about breastfeeding.

But why should I care about breastfeeding?

• **I work in child care,** and it is part of my job to care for breastfeeding babies. I want to have the training and information to take the very best care of all the babies in my care.

• **I am an employer,** and I want to know all I can about supporting my employees, including breastfeeding mothers.

• **There is a mother in my life who is breastfeeding,** my sister or daughter or friend. I want to do all I can to support her choices about feeding her baby.

• **I may have another baby someday.** Although feeding formula is the right choice for our family right now, I’d like to learn more about how I can give my next baby the very best start in life, and how breastfeeding can be a part of that.

If you’d like to learn more, ask your provider for our booklet “Breastfeeding: Making it Work.” Copies can also be downloaded at our website, [http://sph.unc.edu/breastfeeding](http://sph.unc.edu/breastfeeding).