



Healthy Feeding From the Start: A Resource for Expectant Families



A new baby can be very exciting but also overwhelming. As parents, it can be helpful to know what to expect once your baby arrives. Do you plan to breastfeed or bottle feed? How will she tell you she is hungry? When can he start trying solid foods? Thinking through these questions before birth can help you support your child's growth and development across the first year and beyond.

Your baby will rely on you to provide nourishment to ensure she grows healthy and strong. As her parent, you are her most important teacher of healthy eating habits and nurturing her ability to understand her body's signs of hunger and fullness. Feeding your baby is also an opportunity to bond and get to know each other.

This resource explains two approaches that support healthy feeding with your baby. You may want to share this with everyone who will be involved in feeding decisions.

Feeding On-Demand

In the early months, babies will need to be fed "on demand"—this means that babies are able to feed whenever they are hungry or show hunger cues. Hunger cues are unique to each baby. Your baby might:

- Have a specific hunger cry,
- Root or look around for food,
- Suck on his hand or fingers,
- Become irritable or restless, or
- Repeat a unique behavior to demonstrate hunger.

When you respond to your baby's hunger cues, she'll tell you how much food she wants and when she's full. This feeding practice supports healthy eating habits, growth and development beyond her first birthday.

By the time your baby is about 9 months old, you are ready to try a responsive feeding approach.

What is Responsive Feeding?

Responsive feeding is an approach that divides the responsibility for meals and snacks between parent and child. Parents provide a safe and nurturing feeding environment and offer healthy meals and snacks in age-appropriate servings. Your baby decides whether, which foods, and how much to eat. This approach is known as: Parent Provides. Child Decides.

Relying on all the things you learned about your baby's signals of hunger and fullness will help you nurture his feeding skills. You can begin to implement a responsive feeding approach when your child is able to chew and swallow, pick up finger foods, and self-feed.



Why Is Responsive Feeding Important?

A responsive approach to feeding gives your baby the opportunity to learn how to:

- Listen to their body's signals of hunger and fullness
- Develop self-control regarding how much food they will eat
- Build feeding skills such as picking up foods or use utensils
- Actively participate in meal and snack times, and
- Effectively communicate their need for food.

Responsive feeding gives your child the opportunity to notice, understand, and trust their bodies' cues. This helps to build the skills they need to make healthy choices about food as they grow.

Questions? Worries? If you have any concerns about your child's feeding, contact your health care provider immediately. Some babies do have difficulty establishing early sucking/feeding routines so don't hesitate to reach out with questions.



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