

FEEDING BABIES

Is more than just eating

Parents differ in the way they feed their babies. They also vary in how they feel about feeding their infants. For some parents it is a special time for interacting. For others it is a chore to do. It may be boring. Some parents feel it is a waste of time. Feeding your baby can be fun. During the early months it may be one of the few times your baby is awake. This time gives parents the chance to get to know their babies, and for babies to get to know their parents.

The following suggestions may make feeding time a special occasion for you and your baby.

(Put yourself in your baby's place. Think of the feeding time from his point of view.)

STATE Pay attention to whether your baby is awake, sleeping, fussing or crying. Babies who are awake eat better and take less time to feed.

POSITION Hold your baby so he can see your eyes and face. Your baby gets to know you by looking at your face and eyes. Hold your baby close to your body always when bottle and breast feeding. Your baby will enjoy being close and feeling safe.

SAFETY Support your baby's head. The young infant does not have good head control and needs a hand behind his head. You probably are already doing this without knowing it. Hold your baby so her head is higher than her hips. This is to help your baby to swallow and prevent choking. Have you tried eating lying down?

When your baby chokes, coughs, or spits up, stop the feeding, Sit him up or change his position. Talk to him in a soothing manner. Pat him gently until he is calm.

COMMUNICATION Talk to your baby during the feeding. Your voice can be soothing and exciting to your baby.

Respond to your baby's sounds. These sounds are the beginning of your baby's language. Your baby will make more sounds when you talk back to her. Your baby has a short memory (about 5 seconds), so it is important to answer your baby right away.

Talk in sentences rather than baby talk. Your baby will speak better later on if you do. Try different sound with your own voice. Sing or hum—babies respond to different tones and voice levels.

TOUCHING Touch your baby. Touch is one of the most important ways of communicating and interacting with your baby. Stroke gently, give affectionate pats and occasional kisses when you feed her.

MOVEMENT Rock and gently move your baby. Feeding is a good time for rocking your baby gently. Occasionally change her position (as for burping). Allow her to move her arms and legs.

YOUR BABY'S CUES *Your baby will let you know what he needs. He is the expert, then you* (not the doctor). He will tell you when he is full, wants a rest or wants more to eat. Some cues to watch for are:

~ *Hunger cues* – or “I want to eat” – mouthing, rooting, crying, hands to mouth, sucking movements, clenched fingers or tight fists over his chest or tummy.

~ *Satiation cues* – or “I'm full” – turning away, back-arching, pushing away, falling asleep, extended or relaxed arms along side of body, extended or relaxed fingers.

~ *Rest or change of scenery* – “I need a break” – crying, spitting up, choking, back-arching, pulling away, looking away.

~ *Interaction cues* – “I want to socialize” – Smiling, laughing, searching or looking for your eyes, reaching out to touch you.

SUCK/PAUSE During feeding you need to respect your baby's need to suck and rest. In turn, your baby will explore your face during the rest times. This is the beginning of communication between you and your baby.

MOOD Your baby will sense your mood. He can tell if you are happy, sad, or anxious by the way you act. You too can tell if your baby is happy or uncomfortable by the way he behaves.

Some things to try: ~ Quietly talking to your baby about how you feel (i.e., “I'm happy today,” or “I feel sad today, or angry, frustrated,” etc.)

~ Quietly talk to your baby about how you think she feels (i.e., “You seem to be happy today.” “You seem hungry, angry, frustrated,” etc.)

TENSION Your baby can feel your body tone. She will know when you are relaxed, tense, or uptight. So if you are tense, your baby may get tense and upset too. This may affect how well she eats.

Some things to try: ~ take a few deep breaths and try to relax
~ choose a comfortable chair in your favorite room
~ try to think of something pleasant
~ try drinking something; tea, milk or juice
~ find a room away from noise and activity