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How to Create a Baby Feeding Schedule



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Getting into a routine with your baby is important for both of you, but how do you get your little one into a schedule?



Sleep, feed, change. Sleep, feed, change. It's a pattern you're familiar with after caring for a newborn. Though you may be tired of the routine after changing your 10th diaper of the day, there are many benefits of establishing a baby feeding schedule -- for both mom and baby.

Here's how to do it.

Don't Start Too Soon

You may be antsy to start a feeding schedule, but your baby isn't. "Initially, newborns need to eat on demand every two to three hours," says Dr. Tanya Altmann, a pediatrician and author of the book "[Mommy Calls](#)," so creating a baby feeding schedule in the first few months is not realistic. But don't abandon hope -- there are some things you can do to prepare your little one for a schedule even at that stage. "Try to feed often during the day, and don't be afraid of cluster feeding if he prefers every hour during the day," Dr. Altmann suggests. That way, your baby begins to realize that feeding is done during the day and sleeping is done at night.

Find a Rhythm

"From a developmental standpoint, the earliest that a baby can understand routine is at about 4 months of age," says [Dr. Nicole DeVincenzo Garcia](#), a pediatrician and new mom herself.

"This is the age when I start to talk to parents about the importance of structure and routine. This includes everything from a nighttime routine and sleep training to a feeding schedule."

Listen to your baby when starting a schedule. Dr. Garcia explains that at 4 months old, your baby will eat six or seven times every 24 hours -- maybe every 3-4 hours, with a longer stretch between feedings at night. Each time you nurse, he should eat about four to six ounces of breast milk or formula. You'll need to make yourself available to your little one, so be ready to spend some quality time together -- frequently.

"The baby should eat about every three to four hours during the day, so try to plan your day around feedings as best you can," says Dr. Garcia. By the time you're done feeding, burping and changing baby, it might seem hard to get anything else done. Don't worry -- this won't last

forever! After about one or two weeks, you'll notice that your baby starts to recognize the pattern. Growth spurts -- typically at 3, 6 and 9 months -- can disrupt the schedule, but otherwise, once established, try to keep your feeding routine consistent.

Follow Your Baby's Cues

Let your baby lead the way, and a routine may fall into place quicker than expected. "Paying close attention to your infant's cues for hunger and sleep can help ease them into a routine," says [Dr. Rebecca Isbell](#), a pediatrician at the University of Virginia. When your baby wakes up, he should be hungry and ready for his first feeding. After eating, watch closely for the first sign of your little one becoming tired -- look for decreased activity or sleepy eyes. "Try to get them down for a nap quickly when you see those signs, or they may get a second burst of energy that makes napping difficult and often ends with crankiness," Dr. Isbell says. After your baby wakes from his nap, he will be hungry again, and the routine will start over.

Some parents will wait until their infant is overly tired, and will use another feeding to help him fall asleep. "Many babies will have a shorter nap with this routine as their tummies are busy digesting during sleep, and the feeding has cut into their nap time. If you find your infant wakes from his nap well before you would expect another feeding time, wait a few minutes to see if he can soothe himself back to sleep," Dr. Isbell says. This can help get things back on track.

Why Bother?

Creating a feeding schedule may take some careful planning at first, but the benefits for mom and baby are worth the effort. Your baby gets regular nutrition and adequate calories throughout the day, which keeps your little one's energy level consistent by avoiding excessive peaks and troughs in blood sugar, Dr. Garcia notes. It can also help with the quality and regularity of daytime naps. She explains, "As a new mom myself, a feeding schedule helps plan

the day. Sometimes a 24-hour period can seem overwhelming with an infant. However, three to four hour blocks of time are much more manageable."

Curious if your baby is eating the right amount? Read [6 Ways to Tell If Your Breastfeeding Baby Is Eating Enough](#).

Judy Koutsky is the former editorial director of KIWI magazine, a green parenting publication. She was also executive editor of [Parenting.com](#), AOL Parent and [BabyTalk.com](#). Follow her parenting advice on Twitter [@JudyKoutsky](#).

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