

## Supporting Your Baby's Bottle-Feeding Development

### When can I start to offer bottle feeds?

The best time is when your baby shows the following behaviours over a number of days:

- stable heart rate, breathing rate and oxygen saturations
- able to stay awake for a longer time
- showing feeding cues
- sucks on their hands and fingers, your little finger, or a dummy
- These behaviours will usually be shown around **34-36** weeks gestation, but please don't worry if they are shown after this time.
- Holding your baby in skin-to-skin as often as possible helps your baby to show these behaviours when their development is ready.

### At what times do I offer a bottle feed?

Offer a bottle feed when your baby shows you their **feeding cues**:

- opening their eyes, stirring, and stretching
- rooting (turning with a searching mouth)
- bringing their hands to their mouth
- As your baby grows and matures, they will be able to regularly wake and show feeding cues.
- Crying is **not** a feeding cue and may mean your baby has already shown you their **early** cues and will need your help to calm. Your baby may then show you feeding cues again.

Early I'm ready	Mid I'm really hungry	Late Calm me first, then feed me
Stirring, eyes open	Stretching	Crying
Mouth opening, tongue moving	Increased movement	Agitated, cross
Turning head, seeking, rooting	Hand to mouth	Turning red

### What is the best position to hold my baby?

Whilst your baby is developing their bottle-feeding skills it is safe and comfortable for your baby to feed in an elevated side-lying feeding position (using a pillow and footstool). Be guided by your neonatal team on how to use this feeding position.

### What is the best teat to use?

Use a slow flow teat placed in a horizontal position in your baby's mouth so the milk doesn't move too fast. This helps your baby to control the milk flow. Your baby will show signs they need to have breaks during their bottle feed. This is called **pac**ing.

To **pac**e the bottle feed: bring the bottle downwards to cut off the flow of milk for a few seconds, or gently remove the teat. Your neonatal team will help you to learn how often you should **pac**e your baby during their bottle feed.

### How will my baby tell me they would like to stop their bottle feed?

**Stop** the bottle feed when you see:

- finger splay, grimacing, crying, yawning, hiccupping, arching body, turning head away
- loss of interest, tires and/or moves to a quiet sleep
- dribbling milk out of their mouth, sucking stops
- pursing lips, pushing the bottle teat out of their mouth
- **If no further feeding cues are seen after a short pause, give the remaining feed by your baby's naso gastric (NG) tube.**



#### References:

- <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/bottle-feeding-resources/infant-formula-responsive-bottle-feeding-guide-for-parents/>
- Shaker, CS (2013) **Cue-based feeding in the NICU: Using the infant's communication as a guide.** Neonatal Network 32(6): 404-408. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1891/0730-0832.32.6.404>



**Use the Chart below** to help you to support your baby's bottle-feeding development

Score	Category that best describes baby's response to their bottle feed	Action
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moves back to <b>OR</b> remains in a quiet and/or deep sleep with no feeding cues observed – <b><i>follow action.</i></b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give feed by NG tube</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Latches to the bottle teat and begins to suck. Sucking bursts are <b><i>short</i></b> with <b><i>longer</i></b> pauses to breathe <b>OR</b> sucking bursts need <b><i>very frequent</i></b> pacing to help slow the milk flow.</li> <li>Within the <b><i>first 5 minutes</i></b> of the bottle feed baby shows signs of wanting to <b><i>stop</i></b> and/or falls asleep – <b><i>follow action.</i></b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b><i>Stop</i></b> the bottle feed</li> <li>Give remaining feed by NG tube</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Latches to the bottle teat and begins to suck. Sucking bursts are <b><i>short</i></b> with <b><i>longer</i></b> pauses to breathe <b>OR</b> sucking bursts need <b><i>regular</i></b> pacing to help slow the milk flow.</li> <li>Within <b><i>5-10 minutes</i></b> of the bottle feed baby shows signs of wanting to <b><i>stop</i></b> and shows no more feeding cues – <b><i>follow action.</i></b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b><i>Stop</i></b> the bottle feed</li> <li>Give remaining feed by NG tube</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Latches to the bottle teat and begins to suck. Sucking bursts are becoming <b><i>longer with shorter</i></b> pauses to breathe <b>OR</b> sucking bursts need <b><i>some</i></b> pacing to help slow the milk flow.</li> <li>Within <b><i>15-20 minutes</i></b> of the bottle feed baby shows signs of wanting to <b><i>stop. Pause</i></b> the bottle feed and watch baby. Baby shows no more feeding cues – <b><i>follow action.</i></b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b><i>Stop</i></b> the bottle feed</li> <li>Give remaining feed by NG tube</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Latches to the bottle teat and begins to suck. Baby shows <b><i>regular</i></b> bursts of rhythmical sucking, swallowing, and breathing together with <b><i>occasional</i></b> pacing to help slow the milk flow.</li> <li>Baby is calm and awake or moves to a quiet sleep when they have <b><i>finished</i></b> their bottle feed – <b><i>follow action.</i></b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No feed by NG tube</li> </ul>



**References:**

- <https://www.unicef.org/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/bottle-feeding-resources/infant-formula-responsive-bottle-feeding-guide-for-parents/>
- Shaker, CS (2013) **Cue-based feeding in the NICU: Using the infant's communication as a guide.** Neonatal Network 32(6): 404-408. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1891/0730-0832.32.6.404>

