



Feeding Schedules

As a new mother, you may be anxious about the feeding of your baby. You may worry that your baby won't get enough nourishment. Whether you're breast-feeding or formula-feeding, there are two main schools of thought on when to feed your baby: on demand or on a schedule. Neither ensures that new parents will get a great deal of sleep, but deciding on a feeding schedule ahead of time could prove very helpful in the long run.

On-Demand Feedings

On-demand or "cue" feeding occurs when you feed your newborn whenever he's hungry. If your baby is crying, check for a dirty diaper, discomfort or other needs and feed him if he's hungry. Feeding a baby this way is usually seen as the most natural approach, especially in the first few weeks when a baby is getting used to things. It lets the baby know his needs will be met, giving him a sense of security. Parents need not worry about spoiling an infant. All the love and attention you can give him will help him feel more secure.

Newborns have very small stomach capacity and require small, frequent feedings. This can mean several feedings throughout the day and night at short intervals that can vary between one and three hours. It's expected that feedings will become farther apart and more predictable as the baby gets older. The feedings at night should be farther apart than the day feedings. Eventually, the baby should be eating about every four hours. This can take anywhere from two to six weeks.

Scheduled Feedings

Some parents favor a more structured approach to feeding schedules. After the baby is home for a week or two, the feeding times are gradually spaced farther and farther apart, usually about fifteen minutes at a time, until the feeding schedule is about every four hours.

Some parents prefer scheduled feedings because they believe it makes their babies less fussy and more inclined to sleep through the night. It also takes the emphasis off of feeding as the primary interaction between the parents and newborn. Scheduled feedings are often favored by working mothers who can't feed their babies on demand. Many child care providers feed babies on a schedule.

Choosing the Method That Works for You

Both parents and pediatricians debate over which method is best. Neither method has ever been scientifically proven superior. Feeding your baby is a very personal decision. The best way to choose your feeding schedule is to consider the type of lifestyle you lead or intend to lead. Will you be home indefinitely, or do you have a predetermined maternity leave from your job? If you're breast-feeding, you must consider your milk production. It's stimulated by demand: Your body supplies the amount your baby demands. The most important things are that you're as well rested as possible and that your baby is being properly nourished.