

How to assess your baby's feeds

Parent information

When your baby is learning how to feed, it is important to assess their progress. We use a "code" system to describe each feed. For both breast and bottle feeding, we use the numbers 1 to 6 to tell us how each feed has progressed.

Ways to work out if your baby is having enough milk -

- How many wet nappies are there after a feed?
- How wet does the nappy feel? Does it feel heavy or light? What is the colour of urine in the nappy? – Ideally the nappy should contain a good amount of urine which is not orange in colour.
- How long does baby settle after each feed?
- How much weight has baby put on?

As your baby gets older and stronger, they may start to wake early or a little bit later for feeds. Your nurse will help you to work out the timing of the feeds.

Breast feeding codes explained –

1. Baby is lying on your chest and not showing any feeding cues or moving to the breast.
2. Baby is showing feeding cues but isn't attaching to the breast
3. Baby is lying at the breast and getting off and on but not sucking. Baby might be licking the breast.
4. Baby is getting off and, on the breast, and is starting to suck but not swallowing consistently
5. Baby is sucking and swallowing consistently and feeds for a short time, about 5 to 10 minutes. Baby should be sucking and swallowing consistently over this time. It should feel comfortable. Baby may get tired.
6. Baby is sucking and swallowing with consistent swallowing heard and observed. Baby should be having a longer feed and sucking and swallowing repeatedly for long bursts during the whole feed. It should feel comfortable.

Bottle feeding codes explained –

1. Baby is lying on your chest or is asleep in the cot and does not show feeding cues or does not wake for the feed.
2. Baby is showing feeding cues but can't suck or swallow from the bottle.
3. Baby might have one or two sucks but can't keep going and can't complete the bottle
4. Baby might have four to six sucks in a row but might not be able to coordinate sucking and swallowing with breathing. Cannot complete the bottle.
5. Baby can coordinate suck, swallow and breathing and will "self-pace" or rest when needed. Baby may not finish the bottle in 30 mins. Baby may get tired.
6. Baby feeds strongly and can suck, swallow and breath. Baby finishes most of the bottle (>80%) in 30 minutes.

How much do I "top up" after a breastfeed?

If your baby scores:

- 1 – 4:** give them a full feed via the tube.
- 5:** give them between 25 and 50% of the amount of the feed. Your nurse will help you to work it out.
- 6:** if your supply is good, then no top up is needed

How much do I "top up" after a bottle?

- You should give your baby the amount left in the bottle. If your baby scored a "6" and took 80% of the bottle or more, then don't give baby the rest of the amount.
- Once your baby starts to score "6's" they might start waking a little bit earlier for their feed. When this starts happening, you should feed them if they are showing cues.



Consumers contributed
to this information.

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