ROUTINE questions

Babies are far from predictable, but a little structure is nice! SIMONE CASEY takes your questions about breastfeeding routines to the experts

Bringing home your little one is exciting, exhilarating and a bit nerve-racking too. Suddenly you're in charge, and your bub's feeding and sleeping patterns seem to become the number-one priority over everything else. It's easy to obsess over counting the length of feeds, hours of sleep, and the number of wet and pooey nappies, but understanding how breastfeeding works in with sleep and other aspects of your baby's day is a great way to regain control and to relax into a schedule that feels right for your new little family. Knowledge is power, so here are answers to some common questions about breastfed bubs and meal times.

SUPPLY & DEMAND

Q My midwife said to 'feed on demand'. What does this actually mean? – *Shelly Phillips*

A Back in Nan's day, babies were all on strict time-based schedules and demand feeding wasn't discussed. Now we know better, although perhaps the term needs to change. "Demand feeding is becoming an old cliché, promoting the idea that babies will end up ruling the roost," says Sandy Simmons, a lactation consultant from Simply Better Health, who prefers the terms 'on cue' or 'baby-led' feeding. "It's about being aware of and initiating breastfeeding as soon as your baby shows early signs of hunger, such as sucking a fist or beginning to cry," she says. "The more your baby breastfeeds, the more milk your breasts produce. When bub suckles less frequently, milk production slows down." Lesson learnt: feeding on cue is the ideal way to keep your milk production in sync with your baby's needs.

BY THE BOOK

Q My baby sleep book says to feed my newborn for nine minutes on each breast every three hours. He's either not ready at that stage, or screaming for two hours until feed time. What do I do? Everyone tells me to get him into a routine. – *Cara Brown*

A Any book that tells you to restrict the timing of feeds on each side might need updating (or check the author's lactation qualifications). If people are promoting scheduled feeding, they may be thinking more about bottle-fed babies than breastfed ones. "Strict timing is required to prevent overfeeding when a baby is formula-fed, as the same amount is usually given at each feed," says Sandy. "Breastmilk digests easily and quickly, whereas formula-fed babies take longer to digest their milk. So when breastfeeding on a strict, time-based schedule, we often see a low milk supply and an unhappy baby and mum. Books are great as guides, but the best guide is a mum's intuition." Also keep in mind your baby's tummy size – it's about the size of his own tiny fist – and that bub might not want a three-course meal at every feed. Just like you and me, he sometimes wants a snack, a light meal or a heavier feed, and that's okay and normal. ›

CLUSTER UP!

Q My baby turns into a demon feeder for up to six hours up until midnight. He just doesn't seem satisfied and pulls on and off all the time. What's going on? – *Sam Dulac*

A This sounds like cluster feeding to a tee! "Babies may bunch feeds close together, more often than not in the early evenings, causing already tired new mums angst and frustration," says Sandy. Fussiness, pulling off the breast, crying and wanting to stay attached is a common picture. "Cluster feeding is a natural process and may happen at any time of day or night, seeming like one never-ending breastfeed!" adds Sandy, who stresses that it doesn't mean supply is low or any supplementation is required. It used to be thought that cluster feeding was due to milk volume being lower in the evenings, but recent research has disproved this theory. As breastfeeding works on a supply and demand basis, think of it as babies putting their order in for the next day – and there's the added bonus that babies often sleep longer after the cluster ends. As bub gets older, cluster feeding may come and go according to his milestones and growth spurts. Ride with it, it's definitely one of those 'it too shall pass' moments.

MAKING PATTERNS

Q I've demand fed for a few months, but would like to introduce some sort of pattern to our day. I've heard about feed-play-sleep routines… how do they work? – *Sarah Giles*

A Based on learning to recognise bubs' feed and sleep cues, a feed-play-sleep schedule is designed so babies don't learn to associate feeding with sleeping. If demand feeding is working well for you and you don't mind your baby feeding to sleep or until sleepy (even if that's occasional or frequent), there's no need to change. Breastfed babies tend to find their own pattern naturally as feeding becomes less frequent. But if someone else is putting bub to bed, or if you can only get your baby to sleep with the breast and want to move away from that as a settling tool, it may be something to try. "A routine is the important part but the times should be flexible. This helps to accommodate for infant temperament, different metabolisms, health, surrounding environment and family lifestyle," says *PP*'s child health nurse, Jan Murray, who has created the ebook *Suggested Daily Routines* ($10.70 from www.settlepetal.com). Here is Jan's suggested routine for a breastfed bub two to four months of age:

5 OR 6AM
- Breastfeed
- Some bubs will play and others will go back to bed
- Watch for tired signs
- Settle into sleep (at around 6:30 or 7:30am)

REPEAT AT 8 OR 9AM
to settle by 9:30 or 10:30am

REPEAT AT 11 OR 12PM
to settle by 12:30 or 1:30pm

REPEAT AT 2 OR 3PM
to settle by 3:30 or 4:30pm

5 OR 6PM
- Breastfeed
- Awake time
- Bath
- Top-up breastfeed
- Settle into sleep (at around 7:30 or 8pm)

9:30 OR 10:30PM
- Give breastfeed semi-asleep
- Settle to sleep

OVERNIGHT
- Low-stimulus breastfeed if your baby wakes.

For a young bub or bub new to the feed-play-sleep schedule, Jan suggests offering the breast again if he hasn't gone to sleep after 20 minutes. You can always try to settle without feeding next time. The above routine for two- to four-month-olds mentions seven feeds in 24 hours, which could drop to four to five by six months and four feeds by nine months – but again, flexibility is key!

> *"Breastfed babies tend to find their own pattern"*

GIVE IT A BOOST

Q I've been diagnosed with low supply, so feeding every three to four hours isn't enough for my baby. Can I adjust my feeding patterns to boost my milk? – *Jennifer Sachs*

A Yes! Lactation consultants often use a technique called 'switch feeding' for mums with low breastmilk supply. Sometimes this is combined with formula top-ups, while other times the technique is enough on its own to increase breastmilk over a short space of time, even just a few days. "Very simply, bub breastfeeds until feeding becomes less intense, with the suck and swallow pace diminishing with bub slowing down and his eyes starting to close," says Sandy. "This is the time to stop and remove your baby gently from the breast, encourage a burp, then switch over to the other breast until your baby slows down. Again, remove him gently, encourage a burp, and return to the first breast and repeat the process." Each time the breast is milked the milk-ejection reflex (often known as the let-down) occurs. The more this reflex is stimulated, the more milk will be produced. Burping between switches releases any trapped air and arouses your baby to encourage more breastfeeding. Some mums improve the result by gently squeezing the breast if bub is sleepy, to remind him to keep going.

SLOW THE FLOW

Q I have heaps of milk. I don't ever feel like I'm properly draining the breast and never know when to change sides. Is there a feeding routine to help? – *Farrah Stathakis*

A An abundant breastmilk supply can cause issues for mums and babies, with women with an oversupply more susceptible to blocked ducts and mastitis if the breast isn't being drained enough. If you've been diagnosed by a health professional with oversupply, you could try a method called 'block feeding'. "A simple version is to only offer one breast at one feed and the other breast the next feed until the oversupply settles down," says Sandy. If your baby is feeding frequently, even every hour, there are adaptations. "One is when one breast is offered during a two-hour period," says Sandy. "For example if your baby begins to feed at 6am, again at 6:45 and then at 7:30, only offer the right breast at each feed. Then when breastfeeding between 8am and 10am, only offer the left breast at each feed." Block feeding can even be used at certain times of the day when the let-down reflex is the most profuse. As bub grows this may be in the morning, which is a time when milk supply is the highest.

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends babies be exclusively breastfed until six months of age and that breastfeeding is continued until 12 months of age and beyond, for as long as mum and child desire. While breastfeeding is the ideal way to nourish your baby, we recognise not all mums are able to do so. If you have any concerns about your breastfed or bottle-fed baby, make an appointment with your child health nurse or GP.

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