

Cue-Based Feeding in the Special Care Nursery



Learning to breastfeed or bottle feed is an important milestone for your baby. We want to help your baby learn how to feed safely. This is done by looking at cues your baby shows us. Your baby talks to us through changes in their behaviour, facial expressions, breathing, movement and wakefulness. Along with medical needs, cues guide the feeding plan as your baby learns and grows.

Cue-Based Feeding is not based on how much milk your baby takes. Your baby may feed once a day or several times a day. The goal is to turn each feeding into a calm, safe, and nurturing experience that supports a successful transition from gavage feedings to direct breast or bottle feeding.

A successful feeding is about:

1. Recognizing your baby's hunger cues. These cues may be different each time and can occur at different times each day:
 - Wakes up before feeding times
 - Wakes up when you change the diaper and take temperature
 - Brings hands to mouth
 - Sucks on a pacifier
 - Handles diaper change, temperature change, kangaroo care, and non-nutritive breastfeeding without stress cues
2. Recognizing signs your baby needs to stop:
 - Goes to sleep
 - Stops sucking
 - Won't open mouth
 - Turns away from the bottle or breast
 - Seems upset or not interested in feeding
 - Coughs, chokes
 - Breathes faster than when not feeding
3. Helping your baby suck and swallow during feeds. The way you hold your baby, and even the way you place the nipple can provide safer and easier feedings.
 - Ask a healthcare provider about this when first starting to feed your baby
4. Parent Involvement in the Cue-based feeding approach
 - Your infant will be assigned a "readiness score" by the nurse with each handle of care.
 - Once the infant is ready, a medical order is written for the infant to initiate "cue-based or infant-driven feeding".
 - The health care team will discuss with parents the feeding plan each day as needed.
 - The health care team will document the quality of oral feeding.
 - Percentage of oral intake will be reviewed daily
 - Transition from NG tube feeds to ad lib Demand Feedings will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.
 - We encourage parents to be actively involved in the readiness and quality scores together with the health care team.

Adapted from St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton & McMaster Children's Hospital Neonatal Nurseries.