

Baby Sleeping and Eating: What is Normal?

Having a baby can be a wonderful time, but it can also be challenging. Many parents struggle with knowing how much their babies should sleep and eat. Don't despair! It will get easier.

Realistic Expectations for Baby's Sleep

It is normal for baby to:

- Sleep a lot. On average, babies younger than one month sleep 16 to 18 hours per day, but they may only sleep one or two hours at a time. Every baby is different, and this can vary greatly.
- Develop a regular sleep cycle around six months of age. Keep in mind that all babies are different and have varied sleep patterns.
- Wake up frequently to be fed or changed. Waking up often to eat can help increase your milk supply.
- Mix up their days and nights.
- Make noises, cry and whimper every so often while they sleep.
- **Not** "sleep through the night." When experts and parenting books talk about babies "sleeping through the night," they are usually talking about any six-hour stretch. That means that if baby falls asleep at 8 p.m. and wakes up at 2 a.m., he has technically "slept through the night."

The Importance of Back Sleeping

Babies who sleep on their tummies may sleep too deeply. If a baby starts having trouble breathing, she is less likely to wake up on her own and move around if she's sleeping on her stomach. This is why it is safer to place baby on her back for sleeping. Talk to other caregivers to make sure they understand that baby should always sleep on her back.

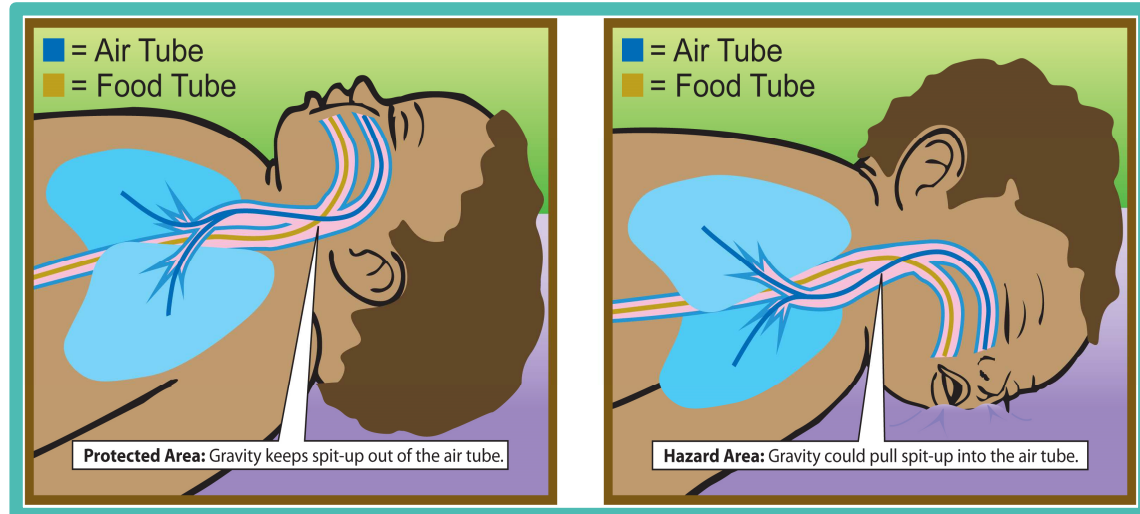


What if baby keeps rolling on to her stomach?

Rolling over is an important and natural part of a baby's growth. Most babies start rolling over on their own around four to six months of age, but some start much earlier. Once a baby can roll from her back to her stomach and from her stomach to her back, she can remain in the sleep position she moves to on her own. To reduce the risk of sleep-related infant death, it is important that baby starts every sleep time on her back and that there are no soft objects, toys, crib bumpers, or loose bedding under baby, over baby or anywhere in baby's sleep area.

You may worry that baby will choke sleeping on his back.

Baby is safer on his back. When baby is on his back, the air tube is on top of the food tube. When baby spits up, the liquid flows back into the stomach, not the lungs. When baby is on his stomach, liquid can pool at the opening of the air tube and may cause choking.



Tips for Helping Baby Sleep on Her Back

Since baby can startle more easily when on her back, it may take a little longer to teach her to fall and stay asleep in that position. By following a few simple steps, you can help baby sleep well while keeping her as safe as possible.

- Keep naptime and bedtime the same every day. This way, baby will get into the habit of going to sleep around the same time each day and evening.
- Watch for signs of sleepiness, like yawning or she starts rubbing her eyes. Start putting her to bed as soon as she's sleepy. When babies are overtired, they often have a harder time falling asleep.
- Provide a consistent night-time routine, such as giving a bath, drawing the shades, giving an infant massage, reading a story, or putting on a sleep sack.
- Plan to take a little extra time putting baby to bed. This way, you can help settle and soothe her if she startles or wakes up when placed on her back. For example, if baby cries when laid down for sleep, instead of immediately removing her from the crib or bassinet, try patting her softly on the chest, stroking her cheek, gently talking or singing to her, or making a shushing sound to help soothe her to sleep.
- Offer a pacifier (if breastfeeding is already well established).
- Use a white noise machine, a white noise phone app, or even a fan to create soothing background noise while your baby is falling asleep.
- Limit nighttime interactions to feeding, burping, changing and gentle soothing; use a soft voice and keep lights dim when caring for baby at night. While baby sleeps during the day, don't be afraid to make noise, such as listening to music or vacuuming. In addition, when baby is awake during the day, talk, sing, and play with her. She is learning daytime vs. nighttime habits.
- When baby cries at night, wait a few moments before picking her up. She may settle back to sleep on her own or she may only need some gentle soothing such as patting her softly on the chest.
- Have others help you so you can get rest too.

Realistic Expectations for Baby's Feeding

It is normal for baby to:

- Eat often. When baby is first born, he may eat eight to 16 times every 24 hours. New babies must eat at least eight times every 24 hours to get enough calories for growth.
- Not eat as often as he grows older.
- Have irregular eating patterns. He may eat every 45 minutes and then sleep for two to three hours.
- Eat small amounts. When baby is first born, he will have a small stomach and will need to eat more often than an older baby. At first, it is normal for baby to eat as little as a few drops up to 2 tablespoons.
- Show hunger signs, including waking up, turning his head towards your breast, sucking on his fingers and fists, and getting fussy.
- Let you know when he is full. He will slow his sucking, press his lips together, turn his head, push away, or fall asleep.
- Swallow some air while eating, so gently rub his back to see if he needs to burp.
- Spit up. Some spit up is normal. The safest way for baby to sleep, even if he spits up, is on his back. He won't choke.

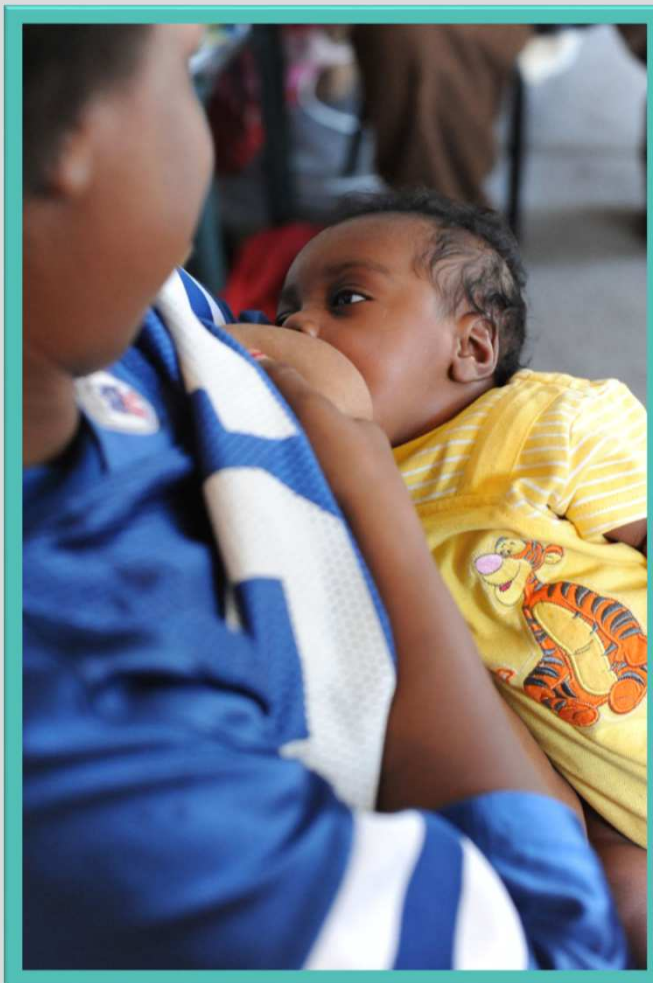


Photo credit: USBC Naomi and Ruth Project.

If you are breastfeeding, you may worry that you're not making enough milk for baby.

You are making enough breast milk, even if:

- Baby cries and wants to eat soon after the last feeding.
- Baby wants to nuzzle at your breasts.
- Baby is waking up during the night to eat.
- Breasts seem small.
- Your breasts don't feel as full as they used to. After about six weeks, the milk supply will adjust to your baby's needs and your breasts won't feel as full.
- Pumping makes a small amount of breast milk. Pumping can produce less milk than if baby is suckling because she is better at getting out your milk than a pump. And remember, newborns have very small stomachs. Just because bottles can hold eight ounces, doesn't mean baby should be eating that amount.

You will know when your breast milk comes in, because your breasts will feel full. This usually happens two to three days after baby is born. Your milk may take longer to come in if you had an IV in during labor, had a C-section or have a medical problem like pre-eclampsia or diabetes. To help with this, hold baby skin to skin so she can nurse more often. Your baby's health care provider will want to watch baby's weight more closely.

How do you know if baby is getting enough to eat?

Your body knows how to make the right amount of breast milk. The more baby eats, the more milk your body will make. Whether you are breastfeeding or formula feeding, signs to see if baby is getting enough to eat are:

- Baby's urine is pale and diluted.
- By day four, baby should have five to six wet diapers every 24 hours and have three or more stools that are yellow (or at least turning yellow).

It's normal for a baby to lose a small amount of weight during the first few days after birth. Some pediatricians will want to check baby's weight one to two days after discharge. If not, be sure to get baby weighed at one week and then every couple of weeks to make sure baby is gaining weight well. Average weight gain is 7 to 8 ounces a week for the first four months and about 3 to 4 ounces per week after four months.

Nothing. Breast milk or infant formula is the only food baby needs for the first six months. Don't add cereal to baby's bottle.

After six months, your doctor may recommend you start adding baby foods to his diet. It is not good to give baby infant cereal before six months or to give formula after breastfeeding. This can lower breast milk supply and can also cause baby to gain too much weight.

What else should you feed baby?



These guidelines apply to healthy, full-term infants.
For specific questions about your baby, ask your pediatrician or health care provider.

Learn more at Michigan.gov/SafeSleep or by reviewing [Your Guide to Breastfeeding](#).