Your Baby's Feeding Journey

Together at the start

Pre oral stage

Learning together

Pre oral stage

Non nutritive sucking

Early oral feeding stage

Learning to feed

Feeding Cues

Early oral feeding stage

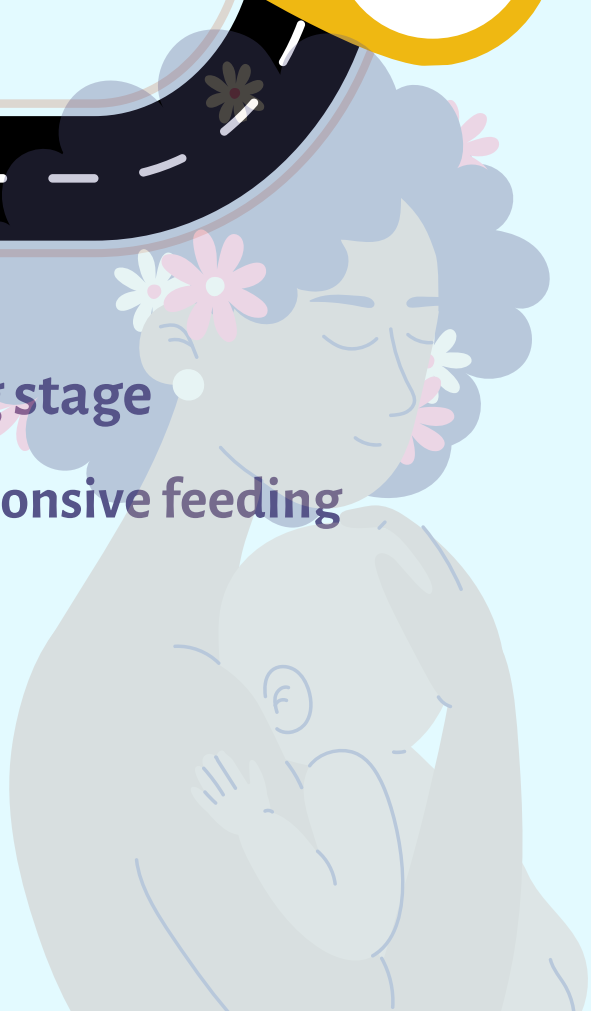
Positioning

Early oral feeding stage

Responsive cue based feeding

Oral feeding stage

Modified responsive feeding



Your Baby's Feeding Journey

Learning together

Pre oral stage

Non nutritive sucking

What is Non Nutritive Sucking

This means your baby is sucking but not getting milk. They might do this with a dummy or your breast (without feeding, after you have pumped milk).

Building positive oral experiences

Sucking helps babies feel calm and safe. It also gets their tummy ready for milk. Sucking at the breast (even without feeding) helps you and your baby feel close and build trust.

Gentle touch

You can help your baby feel calm and safe by being close. Try:

- Helping them bring their hands to their mouth
- Holding their hand gently
- Resting your hand softly on their body

Non nutritive sucking

In Skin to Skin

Hold your baby close to your skin. They don't need to feed–just cuddle, smell you, and feel safe. When your baby feels tired or sad, holding them close can help. Always check with the medical team first.

Finger or Dummy

Touch your baby's lips gently with a clean finger or dummy. Let your baby suck when they're ready.

Baby's Own Hands

Help your baby find their fingers. Gently move their hands to their mouth so they can suck and feel calm.

Follow your baby's cues.
Learning to feed takes time.

Tube feeding your baby

Yorkshire & Humber Neonatal ODN Parent Package

The Yorkshire and Humber Neonatal Operational Delivery Netwo

Your Baby's Feeding Journey

Learning together
Pre oral stage
Building positive oral experiences

Before Baby Starts Feeding by Mouth

Cuddling your baby on your bare chest helps them feel safe and calm. This is called skin-to-skin. It also helps you understand your baby better.

Skin-to-skin cuddles are a good way to get your baby ready to feed by mouth. You can give tube feeds while cuddling like this. Health care professionals can help you.

Gentle touch

Being close to your baby helps them feel calm. You can:

- Help them bring their hands to their mouth
- Hold their hand gently
- Rest your hand softly on their body

This helps your baby feel safe and loved.

Mouth care

You can clean your baby's mouth with breast milk or clean water. This helps keep their mouth healthy.

Mouth care is also a way to show love. Babies who are born early or are poorly can feel comfort through touch, smell, and taste. Gently caring for their mouth helps them feel close to you–even if they can't feed yet.

The nurses will show you how to do this gently and stop if your baby looks stressed.

Non nutritive sucking

If your baby is fed through a tube, they can still practice sucking.

You can let your baby suck on your breast (after you've pumped milk) or use a dummy while they are having their tube feed. Always ask a healthcare professional before trying this.

There is a leaflet with more information about non-nutritive sucking–ask a healthcare professional if you'd like to see it.

Follow your baby's cues. Learning to feed takes time.

European Standards of Care for Newborn Health

Yorkshire & Humber Neonatal ODN Parent Package

Unicef skin to skin

The Yorkshire and Humber Neonatal Operational Delivery Network

Your Baby's Feeding Journey

Early oral feeding stage
Learning to feed
Feeding cues

To begin oral feeding, your baby should be:

- Awake and calm while being held
- Strong enough to give feeding a go
- Showing signs they are ready to learn how to suck, swallow, and breathe together

Feeding Cues

- Wake up and look calm
- Look around
- Turn their head when something touches near their mouth
- Open their mouth
- Lick, nuzzle, or suck gently on a breast, finger, or dummy
- Breathe steadily
- Can be held in a comfortable, tucked-in position

Your baby might not always be ready to feed. This can change depending on how old they are and what kind of medical care they need.

Follow your baby's cues.
Learning to feed takes time.

Brazelton behavioural states

Royal Brisbane Hospital Baby Feeding Cues

The Yorkshire and Humber Neonatal Operational Delivery Network

Your Baby's Feeding Journey

Early oral feeding stage
Learning to feed
Positioning

What is Elevated Side-Lying?

This is a way to feed your baby. Your baby lies on their side, with their head a little higher than their bottom. This can help them feed more safely.

Illustrations Suzy Broome

How to Position Your Baby:

1. Sit on a stool so your knees are higher than your hips.
2. Put a pillow across your lap.
3. Lay your baby on their side on the pillow. Their bottom should touch your tummy, and their legs should point forward.
4. Make sure their head and back are straight, with their cheek resting on the pillow.
5. Gently place your hand on their back.
6. Bring the bottle to their mouth slowly.

If you've had a Caesarean and this feels uncomfortable, talk to the speech and language therapist (SLT).

Tips:

- If your baby isn't ready to bottle feed yet, you can give tube feeds or a dummy in this position to help them get used to it.
- Watch your baby for signs they need a break, like slowing down or turning away.
- You may have been told how much milk your baby needs. If your baby has had enough, let them stop. Don't make them finish the bottle.
- If you're unsure, ask the SLT or nurse for help.

Follow your baby's cues.
Learning to feed takes time.

Best Beginnings

Your Baby's Feeding Journey

Early oral feeding stage
Learning to feed
Responsive cue based feeding

Cue-Based Feeding: What Is My Baby Telling Me?

Cue-based feeding means watching for your baby's signals and responding gently during feeds. Check your baby's feeding cues.

When your baby needs a break

Sometimes babies need a rest during feeding. This helps keep feeding calm and safe. If your baby stops feeding, the rest of the milk can go through their feeding tube.

Signs your baby might need a break:

- Frowning or making a sad face
- Arching their back
- Stretching their fingers wide
- Crying or looking upset
- Milk coming out of their mouth
- Change in skin colour (for example, looking paler, or redder than usual)
- Breathing more slowly or lower oxygen levels
- Breathing faster

Other Signs:

- Suddenly getting sleepy
- Hiccups or sneezing
- Getting tired
- Not interested in feeding anymore

Follow your baby's cues.
Learning to feed takes time.

Royal Brisbane Hospital Baby Feeding Cues

Developmental care guideline NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde

Your Baby's Feeding Journey

Oral feeding stage
Modified responsive feeding

Your baby is starting to feed from the mouth more often.

They still need time, help, and practice.

Key tips which may help:

- Ask your nurse about a feeding tool (like the BFI tool) to help check how your baby is doing during feeds.
- Feed your baby when they show they're hungry– like waking up, turning their head, or putting their hands near their mouth.
- Try not to wait more than 3 hours between feeds. If your baby doesn't show signs, you might need to wake them gently.
- If your baby gets tired or doesn't drink much, you can finish the feed using the feeding tube.
- After feeding, pump your milk. This helps keep your milk supply strong and gives milk for later feeds and mouth care.

Remember:

It's okay if your baby doesn't always wake up to feed or finish their milk. Feeding with their mouth can be slow and takes a lot of energy. It might be different each day, and that's normal– so don't worry.

Look for Signs:
If your baby slows down or turns away, they might need a break.

Ask for Help:
If you're not sure what to do, talk to the speech and language therapist (SLT) or a nurse.

Follow your baby's cues.
Learning to feed takes time.

Unicef breastfeeding assessment tool