

Responsive feeding is a feeding approach that follows the baby's hunger and fullness cues. It recognizes that parents and babies each have a role in the feeding relationship. Parents decide what to feed (human milk or formula) and babies decide when to eat and how much to eat.¹ This approach works when bodyfeeding or bottle feeding.



Responsive feeding is based on the [Satter Division of Responsibility in Feeding](#) (2023).

Responsive Bottle Feeding

- Helps your baby develop secure attachment by learning that you respond to their communication and hunger cues.²
- Supports your baby to eat when they are hungry and stop when they are full.¹
- May help with the transition between bottle feeding and bodyfeeding.

Most babies settle into their own feeding routine over time and each one is unique. It takes time to understand how often and how much your baby wants to eat.

Feed your baby when they show hunger cues. **Let them decide how much (or how little) to eat and stop when they show signs that they are full.³ Do not pressure them to finish the bottle.**

Signs your baby is hungry:

- Putting hands to their mouth.
- Opening their mouth.
- Turning their head back and forth.
- Moving more.³

Signs your baby is full:

- Slowing down or stopping sucking.
- Closing their mouth.
- Turning or pushing away from the bottle.
- Losing interest or falling asleep.^{4, 5}

For a visual guide of baby feeding cues, see [Your Baby's Feeding Cues](#) (Alberta Health Services, 2023).



Responsive bottle feeding technique

- 1 Support your baby in an upright position rather than tilted back or lying flat. Never prop them up with a bottle or put them to bed with a bottle, as this can cause choking. Babies need to be held and touched when they are feeding to develop secure attachments.

Some babies who were born early or have a hard time coordinating their sucking and swallowing reflexes will feed best in a side lying position. For more details, see [Benefits of Feeding in a Side Lying Position](#) (Alberta Health Services, 2023).



- 2 Hold the bottle horizontally to control how much milk is in the nipple of the bottle.
- 3 Stroke your baby's lips from top to bottom to encourage them to open their mouth wide and accept the nipple, rather than pushing it into their mouth.
- 4 Wait for them to begin sucking on the nipple, then tip the bottle so the bottom half of the nipple contains milk.
- 5 Use this time to cuddle and bond with your baby, learning to recognize their hunger cues and signs of fullness.
- 6 Watch for signs that the milk is flowing too fast or that your baby is feeling overwhelmed. These include:
 - Milk leaking out of their mouth.
 - Choking or gagging.
 - Gulping or swallowing quickly without pausing for breath.
 - Squirming, trying to push the bottle away, or moving their head away.
 - A look of distress on their face.
- 7 Switch sides halfway through a feed or alternate sides every feed.
- 8 Every baby has their own feeding rhythm, so sessions may vary in length. Watch your baby's cues, not the clock.

If your baby shows signs of distress, slow the flow by tilting the bottle to remove milk from the nipple, or take a break to burp and cuddle them. Start feeding again when they show signs of hunger.⁵

If your baby often shows signs of stress while feeding, try a different bottle shape or a slower flow nipple.

For more information about choosing and safely preparing formula, see:

- [Feeding Your Baby Formula: Before You Start](#) (HealthLinkBC, 2021)
- [Feeding Your Baby Formula: Safely Making and Storing Formula](#) (HealthLinkBC, 2021)

For more information, visit transcarebc.ca

References

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4. Health Link BC. Feeding your baby formula: Before you start. 1 Oct 2021 [cited 12 Jun 2024]. Available: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/feeding-your-baby-formula-you-start>
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