

Cue-Based Feeding

What is cue-based feeding?

Cue-based feeding means feeding your baby by mouth when they show signs or "cues" that they are ready to eat, and using tube feeding to supplement and ensure they receive the nutrition they need. Cue-based feeding focuses on the quality of feeds and allows your child to feed safely and comfortably within a calm, positive feeding experience. Some doctors and nurses also call this Infant-Driven Feeding, because your baby's hunger will help determine when and how much they eat by mouth.

What are the benefits of cue-based feeding?

With cue-based feeding we see fewer drops in oxygen and heart rate during feeds. The feedings are more calm and positive, and resemble the way you would feed your baby at home. Cue-based feeding:

- Promotes bonding.
- Promotes feelings of hunger and increases interest in eating by mouth.
- Allows reaching oral feeding goals faster, and this may shorten the stay at the NICU.

Will my baby be underfed?

No! Your baby will **always** get the nutrition they need!

- At a minimum, your baby will be assessed every 3 hours for hunger cues.
- Your baby will never go longer than 3.5 hours without a feed (oral or tube)
- Your team will follow your baby's lead for oral feeds.

What does it mean to follow my baby's lead?

- Feeding your baby by mouth each time they cue.

- Stopping the feed by mouth and tubing the rest when your baby is showing that they are done.

How will my baby "cue"?

The following may be signs your baby is hungry:

- Stirring
- Opening Mouth
- Rooting
- Stretching
- Hand to Mouth
- Increased activity

What if my baby has not cued?

This can be totally normal! Your baby is working on so many things, and it can mean they need a break.

- If your baby has not cued, they will be fed by tube every 3-3.5 hours.
- If you are worried that your baby is cueing less than normal, please talk to your medical team.

Cue-Based Feeding in Practice

- ① **Start** oral feeds only when showing readiness cues
- ② **Watch** to see how your baby is responding
- ③ **Pause** when your baby seems stressed
- ④ **Use** calming strategies and re-attempt to oral feed
- ⑤ **Stop** if stress cues continue, or if baby shows "finished" cues, or after 20-30 minutes of orally feeding
- ⑥ **Tube** remainder of the feed

If your baby is:

- Not feeling their best
- Not clearly showing feeding cues
- Extra sleepy
- Showing discomfort with oral feeding

Tube and try again later.

Tube feeding is a tool to keep eating positive
Use it!

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Michigan Medicine for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by Michigan Medicine and for which Michigan Medicine does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Patient Education by [Michigan Medicine](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](#). Last Revised 5/19/2021