

When is your baby ready to feed?

A guide for parents whose baby is tube-fed

Neonatal Speech & Language
Therapy (SLT) Team



Signs your baby may be ready to start feeding from a breast or bottle

- Needs little support with breathing
- Waking around feed times
- Showing feeding cues/signs (see next page)
- Is at least thirty-two weeks gestation



What you can do to help before your baby is ready

- Skin-to-skin time – as much time as possible!
- Let your baby go to a newly expressed breast
- Hold your baby during tube feeds so that they get used to the position
- Sucking practice: sucking on a dummy or finger, especially during tube feeds
- Learn how your baby communicates (see next page)
- Give your premature baby time after having medication or cares (such as a nappy change) before feeding them
- Keep the environment calm and quiet
- Give a dummy dipped in expressed breastmilk (check with your nurse first that your baby is ready)



Signs a baby is getting ready for a feed

Early

Stirring



Licking lips



Turning head



Mouth opening



Sucking (harder)



Rooting*



Mid

Stretching



Smacking lips



Fussing



Mouthing body parts



Breathing rapidly



Increasing movement



Late

Crying



Turning red



Moving head side-to-side



Agitated body movements



** Rooting is when a baby turns their head when the corner of their mouth is stroked*

Why is it important to recognise them?

All baby behaviours are communication. We want our babies to communicate well when they're older, so they need to learn that their communication has meaning from an early age. They learn this through you responding to them.

Signs your baby isn't ready to feed or is struggling

1. Early signs

- Furrowed brow
- Hand stretching out
- Limb tension
- Looking uncomfortable
- Eyes widening

Try & spot these – they could save your baby unnecessary difficulties

2. Mid signs

- Subtle change in colour
- Rapid breathing
- Increased work of breathing
- More dribbling than normal
- Eye watering

By now your baby is in the middle of difficulties

3. Late signs

- Gasping for breath
- Sweating
- Gagging/coughing/choking
- Vomiting
- Hiccoughs
- Bubbly/wet/raspy breath sounds

Your baby is now in real trouble & needs you to stop or pause the feed

If you see any of these signs, pause then offer your baby the breast or bottle again. If you see any again, stop the feed. If you don't think your baby has had enough milk, speak to your nurse or SLT.

Should you have any queries, please contact the neonatal Speech & Language Therapy (SLT) Team via the Dyson Centre for Neonatal Care (01225 824438 or 01225 824833).

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