

Using clever feeding cues your bottle-fed bub is able to tell you if he's hungry, needs a break or would like a little top-up. **SIMONE CASEY** answers your most common questions

READY TO *respond*

Demand feeding is often associated with breastfed babies, but it's important to read feeding cues from your bottle-fed baby, too. Feeding your baby via a bottle is not always about schedules and exact quantities, as your bub is able to have a say in when he wants to eat and how much. You just need to trust him. "Babies are born with the ability to know how much to eat in order to grow," says Carly Veness, a paediatric speech pathologist

from Babble & Munch Speech Pathology, with a special interest in infant feeding and postgraduate training in infant mental health. "Allowing your baby to set the pace by following his hunger and fullness cues helps him to tune into his own internal drive for eating and growing," she says. Your little one is also more likely to feed well if he's hungry and ready for a feed – but not too hungry! Here are the answers to frequently asked questions about bottle-feeding.



How can I tell if my baby is hungry?

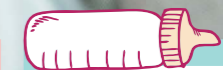
Rather than watching the clock, watch your baby. "Hunger cues may include wide, open eyes with a bright expression, tucking arms and legs up towards his body, turning his head to mouth when he feels touch around his mouth or cheeks, bringing his hands to his mouth, and rapid sucking," says Carly. "Fussing and crying are 'late' hunger cues." Try to offer a feed before bub becomes too distressed.



What is the best way of offering my baby a bottle without forcing things?

Ensuring your baby is awake, alert and showing hunger signs is a great start. Look for the 'rooting reflex', which is an important reflex that your baby is born with to help him latch on and get going. "Encourage this reflex by gently stroking the teat down across his lips and allowing baby to open for the teat, rather than pushing the teat in," says Carly. "Avoid jiggling the teat or tapping your baby's face or chin when he is taking a break during the feed. Pauses

are normal as a feed progresses and it is best not to interrupt your baby's own rhythm." Stop when bub is full and take his 'no' seriously. "Continuing to feed your baby when he wants to stop or he is distressed can set up negative associations and can lead to longer term problems," adds Carly. If feed refusal or distress with feeding are happening regularly, seek help. A speech pathologist with experience in infant feeding can provide support.



How do I know when my baby is full?

Signs bub has had enough may include becoming very relaxed with arms and legs extended, slow sucking or stopping sucking altogether, letting go of the teat or turning away. He may also fall asleep. Other babies may start to chat and play. "It is important to respect a baby's 'finished' signs, even if he hasn't taken the whole bottle," says Carly. Keep an eye on your baby, not the bottle. ▶



Will my baby stop when he's had enough?

Grown-ups can be emotional eaters – many of us will eat when we are bored or depressed (ice-cream and chocolate are the usual suspects!). Luckily, your bub doesn't start off thinking this way. Babies are born with an inbuilt gauge that tells them how much they need to

eat. We can help preserve this gauge by following their cues. Sometimes these can be subtle and you might have to look closely for them and help your baby tune in to what is happening in his body. "Usually babies will stop sucking once they are full, however some babies may

continue to suck at the bottle when they have had enough milk because they find sucking comforting and enjoyable," says Carly. If this is happening, give your baby something else to suck on at the end of the feed, such as your finger or a dummy if they have one, or cuddle him instead.



My baby is putting on lots of weight and I've been told I'm overfeeding him. How can I avoid this?

One of the biggies here is to stop when your little one has had enough rather than trying to finish a set amount in the bottle. No-one but your baby knows exactly how much he needs to drink. "A good sign that your baby is getting the right amount of

milk is consistent growth that tracks along his own curve on the growth chart, regardless of where he sits on the chart," adds Carly. Tables on the back of formula tins tend to be overly generous, so chat to your child health nurse if you are unsure about volumes.



My baby falls asleep on the bottle and never finishes it. I'm worried he isn't drinking enough. How can I make sure I'm not starving him?

Newborns, especially in the first few days after birth or if they are jaundiced, can be super sleepy and have trouble getting through a bottle. If this is happening, try to offer feeds as regularly as possible. "You might need to help your baby wake up for a feed by watching his sleep cycles closely and intervening when he is stirring in light-sleep or a drowsy state," says Carly. "Picking him up, talking to him, using gentle touch and variable touch or movement and changing the nappy may all help to bring your baby to a more quiet alert state," she adds. "Ensure there aren't delays in offering the bottle at the first signs of feeding readiness, otherwise your baby might start to become unsettled and expend his energy on fussing or crying before he can feed."

To know if bub is getting enough, check the wet nappies. There should be one heavily wet nappy for each day of life until he is four or five days old. From then on, four to five wet nappies a day and regular poo is a good sign your bub is well-hydrated. Your child health nurse will also monitor weight. Most babies lose weight in the first few days after birth, then your nurse will usually be looking for an average gain of about 150g a week. ★



My baby wants to suck all the time, even after feeds. Can he possibly still be hungry?

Sucking is often a poorly understood cue. "A lot of people think if you touch a baby's lips or cheek and they start sucking they are hungry," says child health nurse and lactation consultant Naomi Riley, "but this isn't always the case as it is a reflex response to help babies feed." It's very normal for babies to seek comfort through sucking, hence the invention of the dummy. So what

do babies need comfort for? "Being tired, over-stimulated, overfull, having a sore tummy or just needing a cuddle from mummy or daddy are all reasons for sucking," says Naomi. Often if you try to help with these things first before offering another feed your baby may calm down. If not, try another feed. If he feeds then maybe he was hungry – it's not always easy to tell.



How do I stop my baby taking in too much air?

If you hear gulping or slurping on the bottle (or breast), babies sometimes take in a bit of air along with their milk. Wind is a normal bodily function and babies seem to get their fair share. "Your feeding technique with the bottle can reduce the air taken in but may

not help with your baby experiencing wind so don't be too hard on yourself," says Naomi. She also suggests pacing the feed by stopping and letting your little one have a burp a couple of times, and ensuring the teat of the bottle is filled with milk when bub is sucking.



I am offering bottle top-ups after a breastfeed. How much do I give without jeopardising my milk supply?

This can be trial and error, as all babies are different and can be hungrier at some meals than others. To keep stimulating your milk supply a baby needs to ideally be feeding eight or more times in 24 hours, or with two- to four-hourly intervals between feeds. "If the baby is given a big top-up, it

can interfere with his desire to feed as frequently as he needs to. Start small and increase the amount by 10ml until he seems contented," says Naomi. If giving top-ups is a short-term measure, express after a feed to help stimulate more milk; over time the top-ups can be decreased and eventually dropped.

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends babies be exclusively breastfed until six months of age and that breastfeeding is continued until 12 months and beyond, for as long as mum and child desire. While breastfeeding is the ideal way to nourish your baby, we recognise not all mums are able to. If you have any concerns about your breastfed or bottle-fed baby, make an appointment with your child health nurse or GP.