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Staying Connected with Tina Millican

How Much Should My Baby Eat?

Building a mother's confidence in breastfeeding

As a new mom, I constantly find myself worried if my three-week-old baby is getting enough to eat. I am breastfeeding and while he seems to be eating enough, how do I know? My friend has a three-month-old and she struggled with this. She ended up giving up on breastfeeding because she was so worried that her baby girl was not getting enough from her breast. I want to breastfeed for a full year (if not more). What will help build my confidence?

First, and foremost, don't give up. Second, rest assured that you are not alone. *How much should my baby eat?* and *How do I know if my baby is getting enough to eat?* are common questions of new parents. While the answer to this question really depends on your baby's age, weight, health and where they are on the developmental curve, there are some general guidelines that will help ease new parents' minds while building confidence in knowing their baby is thriving and getting enough to eat.

It is important to know that the amount your baby eats will vary from day to day. If you think about your own eating patterns, some days you may feel like you can't get enough to eat, while other days small snacks or meals seem to be adequate. Babies are like this, too. In fact, it is very common for a baby to be inconsistent in the amount of food he eats. When they get older, it is also common for the likes and dislikes of foods to change from day to day (or week to week).

According to The American Academy of Pediatrics, *Your Baby's First Year*, as a general rule of thumb, a baby drinking breast milk or formula exclusively (they have not started solid foods) should be drinking about 2 ½ ounces of milk/formula per day for each pound of body weight. So if your child is ten pounds, they should be drinking approximately 25 ounces per 24 hours. But remember, age, weight, health, activity level and development really influence how much your baby will eat. Depending on these factors, baby may take in a few ounces more or a few ounces less.

My baby is feeding every three hours, peeing and pooping six times a day, and gaining weight, but I'm still not sure how much milk I'm making or how much she's taking.

Unlike a mom who bottle feeds her baby, a breastfeeding mother can't tell how much milk she produces by measuring. However, there are reassuring signs to watch for that your baby is getting enough to eat. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the La Leche League recommend parents look to several key factors:

- Feeding at least every three hours
- Urinating frequently (at least six times a day)

- Having sufficient bowel movements (at least four a day up to six weeks); As your baby gets older, bowel movements may occur less often, and may even skip a number of days.
- Gaining weight (By the age of two weeks, the baby should have regained his birth weight; an infant can drop up to 10% of his birth weight before being discharged from the hospital.)

In addition, if you are breastfeeding, ask yourself these questions:

- **Is my baby gaining weight?** Steady weight gain is often the most reliable sign that a baby is getting enough to eat. Although most babies lose weight soon after birth, it's typically regained — and then some — within 10 days to two weeks. Your baby will be weighed at each checkup. If you're concerned about your baby's weight, you may want to schedule more frequent weigh-ins.
- **How often does my baby breastfeed?** Most newborns breast-feed eight to 12 times a day — about every two to three hours. By six to eight weeks after birth, your baby will probably begin to go longer between feedings. During growth spurts, your baby may take more at each feeding or want to breastfeed more often. Trust your body's ability to keep up with the increased demand. Experts including The La Leche League agree on a “golden rule”, the more often your baby effectively breast feeds, the more milk your breasts produce.
- **Can I hear my baby swallowing?** If you listen carefully, you'll be able to hear your baby swallowing. Also look for a strong, steady, rhythmic motion in your baby's lower jaw. A small amount of milk may even dribble out of your baby's mouth.
- **How do my breasts feel?** When your baby is latched on successfully, you'll feel a gentle pulling sensation on your breast — rather than a pinching or biting sensation on your nipple. Your breasts may feel firm or full before the feeding, and softer or emptier afterward. If breastfeeding hurts, ask your baby's doctor or a lactation specialist for help.
- **What about my baby's diapers?** By the fourth day after birth, expect your baby to have six to eight wet diapers a day. Also expect regular bowel movements — often three or more a day. The stool will be dark and sticky for the first couple of days, eventually becoming seedy, loose and golden yellow.
- **Does my baby seem healthy?** A baby who seems satisfied after feedings and is alert and active at other times is likely getting enough milk. Also look for a healthy skin tone.

According to The La Leche League, although many new moms worry about baby's food intake, most babies are getting enough to eat and it's rare that this becomes an actual problem. If your baby is feeding at least 8 times per day, you hear your baby swallowing when breastfeeding, and your baby is having at least 4 bowel movements a day, you can feel confident that your baby is getting what they need from your breast.

When to seek help? Marianne Niefert, M.D. and author of *Great Expectations: The Essential Guide to Breastfeeding*, suggests that if any of the following is occurring, please consult your pediatrician, family doctor, or lactation support professional.

- Baby isn't gaining weight
- Baby isn't wetting six to eight diapers a day or having regular bowel movements

- Baby is consistently fussy after feedings – may be an indication that they are not expressing the milk from the breast efficiently
- Baby seems excessively sleepy all the time
- Baby isn't interested in breastfeeding
- Baby spits up forcefully or more than a small amount at a time

Other helpful feedings tips and considerations:

1. **A healthy baby will stop eating when full.** For the most part, a baby's appetite is self-regulating. If your baby is eating a lot, he needs to.
2. **A healthy baby will not starve himself.** Unless your baby is sick, or something else is wrong, your baby will eat. If your baby is not losing weight, seems healthy and happy, and your pediatrician says they are developing well, you most likely have no reason to worry.
3. **When a baby cries, it does not always mean they need to eat.** One of the most challenging parts of being new parents is the fact that babies can't tell you what's bothering them. Crying is how they communicate, and making sense of those cries is one of the toughest feats in those first few weeks. How do I know if my baby is hungry? Look for early signs of hunger, such as increased alertness, stirring, sucking motions, rooting, and lip movements. Fussing and crying are later cues. The sooner you begin each feeding, the less likely you'll need to soothe a frantic baby. If your baby is sleeping and does not show feeding cues in three hours during the day, try to wake your baby. Of course, not every cry means hunger. Respond and comfort your crying baby by holding and talking to him. A change of environment, a clean diaper or a cuddle may be all that your baby needs. Feed your baby when you know he is hungry.
4. **Growth spurts affect the amount of food your baby takes in.** The first several growth spurts are signaled by increased milk consumption. The first growth spurt occurs about a week after birth, the next at about three weeks, then six weeks, then three months. After about five to six months your baby may begin to eat less because he may be growing at a slower rate, or because of teething pain. Another growth spurt will occur at between eight and ten months, when you will see increased milk/food consumption once again. Because they are using more energy, you will see an increase in his food intake as baby begins to crawl or even walk.

Some breastfeeding moms may find it helpful to keep a [breastfeeding log or diary](#) to note each feeding session, time on each side, if you heard baby swallowing and number of wet/dirty diapers. There's no need to be obsessive about this, but spot-checking can be very reassuring as you establish your milk supply, and the information is useful to share with your pediatrician.

If you are a breastfeeding mother and you are “stuck”, the information above should help. You may also turn to one or two supportive people that can encourage you through this process and help you meet the goals you have set out for breastfeeding. Comfort and confidence gained from reliable information and trusted support will have a huge impact on attaining your goals. You can do this!

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Additional Breastfeeding Resources

Consult your pediatrician, family doctor or lactation support professional

Websites

*American Academy of Pediatrics, www.aap.org
International Breastfeeding Centre, www.nbc.ca
La Leche League International, www.llli.org*

Books

*New Mother's Guide to Breastfeeding, American Academy of Pediatrics
Great Expectations: The Essential Guide to Breastfeeding, Marianne Neifert, M.D.
The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding, La Leche League
The Ultimate Breastfeeding Book of Answers: The Most Comprehensive Problem-Solving Guide to Breastfeeding, Jack Newman, M.D.*

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