

Night Feeds

Featured Article: Night Feeds

"Is my baby hungry at night?", "Is my baby getting enough calories during the day?", "If I night wean, will my milk supply crash?", and "Do I need to night wean?" These wonderful questions surface when one is considering making changes to nighttime feeds. There is relevance to all of these questions, and these can serve as a beginning point to this conversation.

I want to start by stating that if you like offering the feed at night or find it is not a problem, then Don't Change A Thing. If you are struggling with it at night, here is some information you should consider.

There can be much variation in timing for when a baby is ready to night wean. Several factors influence this process: the baby's age, how many calories are going in during the day, milk supply, growth spurts, teething, illness, and metabolism rate, to name a few.

When a baby comes into the world, one of the driving factors that wakes a newborn is hunger. For the first month or two, while the mother builds her milk supply and the baby is busy gaining back its birth weight and beyond, a baby needs to be fed every two to three hours. This can apply to nighttime as well. As the baby ages, nighttime feeds start to consolidate. The norms for night feeds that I am outlining here are for babies who are growing well and obtaining enough calories during the day. Around four months of age, a baby needs anywhere between zero and two night feeds. By five to six months a baby can go five to six hours between feeds at night (if they need a feed at all,) and for most babies, by eight to ten months, they no longer need night feeds. I have had a couple of cases where the ten-month-old needed a nighttime feed.

What happens during the day, developmental milestones and growth spurts can affect these general numbers. For example, a six-month-old might be down to one feed. She hits a growth spurt and suddenly needs an additional feed at night. The teething baby might want another feed at night because breastfeeding soothes their gums. When a child is fevering, parents will want to keep their little one well hydrated thus leading to an increase in night feeds.

Here are a few tips to help you think through nighttime feeding:

- Talk to your baby's pediatrician, and ask their opinion about dropping night feeds.
- Make sure your baby is getting plenty to drink during the day. If your child gets distracted while they feed, you can go into a dark room with no stimulation to help them focus on the feed.
- Cluster feeds in the late afternoon can help get those extra calories in closer to bedtime.
- The week before making sleep changes, gather some information about the quality of your baby's feed. When your baby cries out, and you put her on the breast, does she suck, suck and fall asleep, or is it a long sustained feed? If he is bottle fed, how many ounces does he drink? If he is drinking 2 to 3 ounces and he usually has 6 to 8oz during a daytime feed, or the quality of the breastfeeding is poor, then you can consider that a nonnutritive feed.

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- When transitioning to solids, do pay attention to food sensitivities. If your baby's tummy is upset, she might ask for more nighttime feeds.
- When transitioning to solids, do pay attention to your little one getting enough liquid during the day. Sometimes they ask for more night feeds simply because they are thirsty.

When weaning, there are several approaches you can take.

- First, think about the number of feeds. If your little one is taking two nighttime feeds, they may only drop one of those feeds. If they are taking one feed, it may be pushing that one feed to later is the solution.
- Some parents prefer a more gradual approach to dropping night feeds, meaning offering a little less every night over the course of several weeks.
- Some parents want to go cold turkey, meaning that a parent would not offer any milk during that feed time.
- There are pluses and minuses to each approach. One thought is that if you are concerned about your milk supply, the more gradual approach is better. If you go cold turkey, you might need to consider pumping to either help prevent plugged milk ducts and/or maintain one's milk supply.

Let me know if you have any questions or need support going through this process. I am happy to help.