

Won't I Spoil My Baby?

New parents often question whether it is okay to hold and feed their babies frequently in the early weeks and months. Will holding a baby cause a baby to want to eat too often? Isn't it better for babies to learn to comfort themselves?

Parents are often led to believe that holding a young baby "too much" is wrong and will "spoil" a baby. This belief is not based upon sound research or an accurate understanding of human needs and development. **Human babies need human contact for healthy growth and development.** Unlike other mammals, human babies are born with an immature brain and undergo rapid development in the first year of life. Human milk has components which promote optimal brain development. **Skin-to-skin contact**, which comes naturally with breastfeeding, is equally important in developing the centers of the brain that impact relationships and socialization.

Many parents report that their infants are most content when they are being held. They are not thinking, "I want to be spoiled." **They are simply doing what comes naturally for them.**

It has also become popular to think you can "teach" your baby a "schedule" from birth. This is NOT natural, and can actually cause harm. Strict scheduling of feedings has been shown to cause a lack of adequate weight gain in babies. In part this is because breastfeeding can only work if the milk is removed often enough to keep production up. It is truly a "supply and demand" system, and the frequency of removal matters, especially in the first few months.

How do parents meet the growth and development needs of their infants in the midst of cultural beliefs that holding babies is "harmful," and that putting young babies on a strict sleeping and feeding schedule is "good"?

- 1. In the first several months, hold your baby frequently.** When possible, hold your baby skin-to-skin, touch your baby and talk to your baby. You may find that your baby cries very little and quiets easily.
- 2. Consider learning how to use a baby sling,** especially if your baby was born early. Your baby will benefit from being close and you will benefit from having free hands. Find a sling that is comfortable, learn how to use it safely and practice using it. Put your baby in a car seat when you are driving in the car. When not in the car, put your baby in a sling.
- 3. The American Academy of Pediatrics "Safe Sleep Guidelines" (2016) recommend that your baby sleep in your room** for the first year. Having a bassinet or a crib near your bed will allow you to feed your baby without leaving your bedroom. Infants who sleep in close proximity to their mothers regulate their breathing patterns better and decrease their risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- 4. Feed your baby when your baby shows feeding cues, at least every 2 to 3 hours until your milk supply is well-established. Never ignore a baby who is asking to be fed or held.**
- 5. Your baby will soon be crawling, walking and running!** It is crucial for a baby to feel safe and secure in their early months. Enjoy this time when your baby wants to be held. Very soon your baby's world will open up to many other activities and interests!

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