



IABLE

Institute for the Advancement of Breastfeeding & Lactation Education

Cluster Feeding

“Cluster feeding” is a term used widely to describe a range of feeding patterns in newborns and young infants. It is **normal** — but it is also often misinterpreted by breastfeeding parents as a sign of low milk production.

What Is Cluster Feeding?

- **Periods of more frequent feeding**, often in the evening hours.
- Sometimes used to describe the **normal frequent feeding schedule of newborns**, especially breastfed babies.
- **Babies are often sleepy in their first 24 hours after birth**, then feed very frequently. This helps the transition from small amounts of colostrum to larger volumes of mature milk.
- **Often misinterpreted** as a sign of low milk production — in most cases it is not.

Why Do Babies Cluster Feed?

We don’t know exactly why, but it likely reflects several things happening in the newborn period. One study found that breastfed babies tend to have periods of **more frequent eating** in the evenings, while formula-fed babies tend to have periods of **more fussing or crying** in the evenings.

- **Breast milk digests quickly** — about every 2 hours — so breastfed babies get hungry more often than formula-fed babies.
- **Frequent feeding builds milk production.** Nursing often helps increase and maintain milk production.
- **Milk volume varies through the day**, so a baby may eat more often when production is temporarily lower.
- **Comfort and closeness.** Fussiness or wanting to be held may reflect early brain development rather than hunger.
- **Growth spurts and sleep changes** can also trigger a cluster-feeding phase.

How Do I Know It’s Not Low Milk Production?

Perceived low milk production is one of the most common reasons for weaning or supplementing. The best indicator that your production is meeting your baby’s needs is your baby’s **growth curve**. After an initial dip in the first few days, babies gain about an ounce (30 grams) a day over the first 3-4 months.

- If your baby is **gaining weight appropriately** and your baby’s physician agrees, your milk production is adequate.
- In the **first 5 days** postpartum, very frequent feedings are normal - weight loss greater than 10% is the usual red flag.
- If you are unsure if your baby is gaining well, please schedule a **weight check** with the baby’s physician or a lactation specialist.

When to Be Concerned — Contact Your Provider If...

- You don't feel increased breast fullness by **day 5** after delivery.
- Your baby's stools have not transitioned from black and tarry at birth to loose, yellow, and seedy by day 3-4.
- Your baby's **diapers are not wet** with every feeding when you notice increasing milk production and breast fullness.
- Your baby **isn't waking on their own** to eat AND is hard to wake or falls asleep immediately after latching.
- Your baby is **inconsolable** — unable to be calmed for 2 hours or more, even at the breast.
- You are worried production isn't meeting your baby's needs — schedule a **weight check with your child's physician**.
- **You are worried you might shake your baby.** Please put the baby down in a safe place and call for help immediately.