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Should You Dream Feed?



Judy Koutsky
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To dream feed or not to dream feed? That's now becoming a big question. Find out what dream feeding is all about and if it's right for your baby.



You may have heard about dream feeding from your neighbor or mom's group, but you may not know exactly what it is. Here are the ins and outs of dream feeding so that you can decide

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if it's a good fit for you and your little one.

What Is Dream Feeding

A dream feed -- sometimes also called a sleep feed -- is a feeding delivered to your baby while he is sleeping. That's right -- while he is sleeping. You just pick up the baby and offer him breast or bottle, generally before you yourself go to bed for the night. "I often have parents time the dream feed to follow the same spacing pattern as daytime feedings to ensure optimal intake," says Karen Schwarzbach, a certified sleep consultant and founder of [Babies to Sleep](#). So if you're feeding your baby every three hours by day, the dream feed would be three hours after your baby's last awake feeding. Usually you'll dream feed your baby once per night -- and don't forget to burp him!

What Are the Benefits?

Some parents, especially those whose babies have medical issues such as gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), find that dream feeding allows the baby to escape the pain associated with nursing or bottle feeding, says Melanie Potock, a pediatric speech-language pathologist, feeding specialist and coauthor of the forthcoming book "[Parenting in the Kitchen](#)" For other families, the appeal of dream feeding is that the baby will sleep through the night instead of waking up for a feeding, says Schwarzbach. Still others do it if their babies do not consume enough milk or formula during the day. The dream feed can ensure your baby is getting the amount of milk or formula your doctor recommends.

What Are Some Drawbacks?

As long as your baby is getting plenty of time experiencing reflexive suckling while awake, he'll learn how to suckle on his own. But when baby becomes dependent on dream feeding, no learning is taking place, and it's possible that he'll lose his ability to suck purposely, says Potock. "My recommendation is to keep a balance between dream feeding and conscious suckling. That way, baby is soothed and comforted and may even fall asleep at the breast or

toward the end of a bottle, but is still learning to suck-swallow-breathe with intention over time."

Also, although dream feeding does benefit babies who aren't getting enough calories during the day, not every baby needs those extra calories. And if he doesn't, you're not saving yourself any sleep, because you end up "stimulating the digestive process by delivering food the body now has to process," says Schwarzbach. "It's not only overfeeding the baby, but it can result in a full diaper that then needs to be changed before morning." That full diaper might wake your baby up. Who's dreaming now?

What Should You Do?

Ultimately, whether you decide to dream feed or not is a personal choice. Some moms think it's better for babies to eat only when they're awake, so dream feeding isn't a good option for them. Other moms may have a difficult time getting their babies to sleep through the night or fear that their babies are not consuming enough calories during the day, so dream feeding may appeal to them. Plus, some babies take to it and will suck reflexively while they're asleep, while others may wake up or get fussy.

To help make your decision, check with your pediatrician to get her thoughts. If you do decide to try it, follow your baby's cues. It will be a better fit for some babies than for others. As with most parenting decisions, it will involve some trial and error, but in the end, you'll figure out what's best for both you and your baby. Sweet dreams!

Want tips on breastfeeding? Read [How to Create a Baby Feeding Schedule](#).

Judy Koutsky is the former Editorial Director of KIWI magazine, a green parenting publication.

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