

# Cluster Feeding – Multi-Course Menu for Babies



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**A** well-known phenomenon in the first few days or perhaps weeks, is so-called “cluster feeding”. Here, the intervals between the individual breast-feeds are often very short so that you perhaps have the impression that you are breastfeeding for hours on end. On the other hand, during the period of normal cluster feeding, there are certainly also many hours when your baby is sleeping. Such “breast-feeding binges” occur particularly often during the evening hours (but not only then). Even though this breastfeeding behavior can be exhausting or even worrying, its effect is especially long-lasting: the development of the milk production.

**There are many reasonable explanations for these breastfeeding marathons:**

- › **Small babies have only a very small stomach capacity.** During the pregnancy they were constantly supplied with food via the placenta and the umbilical cord. Thus, frequent small meals better correspond to the prenatal conditions than do less frequent large meals.
- › **Sucking and breastfeeding require a great deal of strength and energy,** particularly in the early days, and need practice; for this reason, newborns like to have short rests and brief naps during their meal.

- › The frequent short breastfeeding episodes stimulate particularly well the release in the mother's body of the hormone prolactin, essential for milk production. However, prolactin develops its full effect on milk production after 8 to 16 hours. Thus, it could be said that **the baby who continually breastfeeds in the evening places an "order" for the milk for the next day.** If, out of an abundance of caution, additional fluid or food is given, this interesting interaction can be significantly disrupted.
- › **The baby's hormones also play an important role in cluster feeding.** During the extensive breastfeeding period, the hormone cholecystokinin is released. If the hormone level is sufficiently elevated after a certain amount of time, this conveys to the baby a feeling of being full. The cholecystokinin level sinks again relatively quickly so that after 10 to 20 minutes, the baby can again develop a feeling of hunger and, in turn, begins to suck once more. This loop can be repeated several times before the baby falls into a deep, longer-lasting sleep. In this case, it is the act of sucking which triggers the feeling of being full. If the baby sucks on a pacifier instead of the breast, this can considerably affect the weight gain.
- › **During these frequent breastfeeding periods, the newborn could presumably fill up the entire gastrointestinal tract** so that he can allow himself to sleep longer without risking too much hunger.

**Whatever other explanations for the baby's behavior might also be considered – it is completely normal and makes sense!**




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International Board Certified Lactation Consultants are the only internationally approved breastfeeding and lactation specialists having a medical background.


The decision to breastfeed or not to breastfeed has short- and long-term impact on the health of child and mother. However, breastfeeding sometimes turns out to be difficult and perhaps professional, competent assistance is needed.


### **What you should be aware of during the time of cluster feeding:**

Even when cluster feeding represents a normal and healthy behavior, it must be ensured that the baby actually receives sufficient calories.

 In between the times of cluster feeding, there are normally also sleeping and resting times, which you yourself should also use as such.

 A baby who is being breastfed well has mother's milk bowel movements several times a day from the 5<sup>th</sup> day of life until the 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> week of life.

 After an initial weight loss of about 5-7% (max 10%) the baby is growing approximately along his weight percentile.

 Alarm signals which require a closer look at the frequent breastfeeds are sore nipples, an excessively robust let-down, repeated plugged ducts, serious jaundice, particular sleepiness or the baby's discontent over the course of the whole day. In these cases, please contact a professional.

Trust your baby, trust your body! The more you meet the needs of the baby for these frequent breastfeeds, the better and more rapidly the milk production will be established.



#### SOURCES:

- › VSLÖ-News March 2011
- › Dr. Diane Wiessinger 2006, How Babies Eat; [www.normalfed.com](http://www.normalfed.com)
- › Bergmann NJ: Neonatal stomach volume and physiology suggest feeding at 1-h intervals. Acta Paediatr. 2013 Aug;102(8):773-7

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