

# What is responsive feeding and how can it help to shape a baby's future?

The first 1000 days of a baby's life, from conception to the age of two, are crucial<sup>1</sup>

## Making the right decisions during this period can help deliver lifelong benefits<sup>2</sup>

It's well known that breastfeeding is an unparalleled way to feed an infant, delivering numerous benefits to both mum and baby, in the short- and long-term.

But it is less known that breastfeeding actually heightens infants' ability to self-regulate their energy intake.<sup>3</sup> There's two parts to this; the act of breastfeeding and the breast milk itself.

Research has shown that infants fed breast milk from a bottle, rather than directly from the breast, were 67% less likely to respond to their internal satiety cues.<sup>4</sup> What's more, babies fed breast milk from a bottle, rather than from the breast, gained significantly more weight, which could be linked to an increased risk of obesity in later life.<sup>5,6</sup>

The act of breastfeeding, rather than just breast milk, is therefore associated with better appetite regulation.

## So why does breastfeeding promote self-regulation?

Breastfeeding is a naturally responsive way of feeding. Responsive feeding refers to a reciprocal relationship between infant and caregiver to communicate feelings of hunger and satiety through behavioural cues, followed by a correct interpretation of those cues and a response from the caregiver.<sup>7</sup> Breastfeeding naturally lends itself well to the activity of responsive feeding as there is no set limit of preplanned milk and the mother and baby are in such close proximity.<sup>8</sup>

When breastfeeding is not possible, feeding responsively may still be possible from a bottle. To help parents and caregivers **SMA® Nutrition** has developed a leaflet full of practical tips which is available to download from our website.



## The importance of responsive feeding is recognised by:

- UNICEF<sup>9</sup>
- WHO<sup>10</sup>
- NHS<sup>11</sup>
- RCN<sup>12</sup>

If you want to find out more about the 'UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative', you can find their top tips for responsive bottle-feeding on our website

## How else can we help to support infants grow at a healthy rate?

Whilst we have discussed the importance of the behavioural aspects of infant feeding, it's recognised that the nutritional profile of food given to an infant in early life is significant too.

With that in mind, over the past 50 years, **SMA® Nutrition** has invested in protein research to develop a low quantity, high quality protein formula following evidence that this supports slower growth rates comparable to that of a breastfed baby.<sup>13</sup>

Using a formula that has a protein profile closer to breast milk supports healthy growth<sup>13</sup>

## Percentage difference of essential amino acids compared to breast milk<sup>15</sup>



Four essential amino acids have been shown, when supplied in excess, to be associated with an increased release of insulin. This can cause a cascade of reactions in the body that may result in faster growth.<sup>14</sup> The amino acid profile of breast milk is the best estimate of infant amino acid requirements.

**SMA® PRO First Infant Milk** has an amino acid profile closer to that of breast milk, with lower levels of those four amino acids compared to other first infant milks.<sup>15</sup>

It is the only first infant milk clinically proven to achieve a growth rate comparable with a breastfed baby.<sup>13</sup>

By combining the practical elements of responsive parenting<sup>16</sup> with a formula clinically proven to show growth comparable to a breast fed baby<sup>13</sup>, we can help give formula-fed infants the best chance for healthy growth and the associated lifelong benefits.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE:** The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recommended that pregnant women and new mothers be informed on the benefits and superiority of breastfeeding – in particular the fact that it provides the best nutrition and protection from illness for babies. Mothers should be given guidance on the preparation for, and maintenance of, lactation, with special emphasis on the importance of a well-balanced diet both during pregnancy and after delivery. Unnecessary introduction of partial bottle-feeding or other foods and drinks should be discouraged since it will have a negative effect on breastfeeding. Similarly, mothers should be warned of the difficulty of reversing a decision not to breastfeed. Before advising a mother to use an infant formula, she should be advised of the social and financial implications of her decision: for example, if a baby is exclusively bottle-fed, more than one can (400 g) per week will be needed, so the family circumstances and costs should be kept in mind. Mothers should be reminded that breast milk is not only the best, but also the most economical food for babies. If a decision to use an infant formula is taken, it is important to give instructions on correct preparation methods, emphasising that unboiled water, unsterilised bottles or incorrect dilution can all lead to illness.

The only First Infant Milk clinically proven to achieve a growth rate comparable with a breastfed baby<sup>13</sup>



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Supporting you to support parents

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## What to remember to tell parents when responsively feeding

### Hungry

- Sucks on fists
- Smiles and gazes at caregiver
- Opens mouth while feeding
- Cries or fusses
- Wakes or tosses

### Full

- Is distracted
- Turns head away
- Spits out the nipple or falls asleep
- Slows or stops sucking
- Seals lips