

Well Child Care

TIP SHEET FOR PROVIDERS

Key Themes

- Introduce idea of reading cues early.
- Emphasize can't spoil baby: Important to follow baby's cues for feeding, sleeping and wanting to be held.
- Enjoy baby's increasing sociality with parents.
- Frame introducing solids in terms of the feeding relationship and following cues.
- Focus on sleep timing and continuing with a calming routine to help with transitions to sleep.
- Offer frequent follow up if parents seem very worried. The provider-parent relationship can be a very stabilizing resource for new families.

Development

4 month olds are becoming increasingly social and vocal with more **sustained back and forth babbling**, inflections and high pitched squeals.

They often want to be held facing out to the world to observe and join in interactions. They already have the beginning of **social timing**.

Some 4 month olds are also already starting to be able to differentiate familiar from unfamiliar faces. An early sign of the beginning of stranger anxiety is the baby will look at a new person and then check their parent's face to see if they are safe.

Babies at this age begin to follow patterns and can anticipate when parents are getting ready to feed them.

They love routines. Nap and bedtime routines help with the transition to sleep.

Feeding

At 4 months of age, babies are more efficient at feeding and can handle larger volumes, so the interval between each feeding is a little longer than during the newborn period. This coincides with more consolidation of night sleep.

Given their rapid brain development, babies are becoming much more curious and social which can lead to feeding interruptions where the baby stops to look around or

interact with those around them. Parents can worry about this but it is actually a good sign that their baby is getting more curious.

It continues to be very important that **parents follow their baby's hunger and satiety cues**. It can be easy to lose sight of this with a baby that is changing so fast. Each feeding interaction is a chance for parents to be very responsive to cues. It is these thousands of interactions that literally co-construct their baby's brain development.

When parents talk to their baby during feeding about cues and what their baby is communicating, language is learned more readily.

Babies gain body fat rapidly in the first six months of life and reach their highest percentage of adiposity around 6 months of age. Parents can worry about their baby's rapid growth at this stage and conversely, can worry when later in the first year, the baby grows taller and overall percentage of adiposity decreases.

Between 4 and 6 months of age, most infants start to show interest in what their parents are eating. There is a developmental window that opens at this age for the introduction of solids. Babies show interest during mealtimes by visually tracking what others are eating, by making movements with their mouth or reaching out for a sip or a bite.



Increasing sociality of 4-month-olds

Providers—Ask parents if they think their baby is showing any interest yet in solids. This opens a conversation about the baby’s readiness from the perspective of what the parents are already observing.

Talk about any feeding cues observed during the visit. For example, the provider could say “*Oh, it looks like you are done*” or “*Guess you’re stopping to talk to daddy for a minute*” or “*it looks like you want more*”.

Mealtimes are where a lot of the emotional tone of the family is set very early. Talking about introducing solids in terms of the feeding relationship (ie joining the family “dinner party”) can help parents keep their focus on enjoying the time together and following their baby’s cues rather than getting overly worried about exactly what foods and exactly how much their baby is eating.

Sleep

Around 10–12 weeks, babies start to **develop a circadian rhythm**. They start to sleep less during the day and longer at night. There is a transition from having no daytime/nighttime pattern to more predictable nap times (usually 3–4 per day) and a need for an earlier bedtime with more consolidation of night sleep. Most babies continue to feed a couple times during the night.

At around 3 months of age, babies change to **entering sleep from the Active Phase to the Quiet phase** of their sleep cycle and transition to deeper sleep more easily than when they were younger.

Calming routines and rituals around sleep help the baby anticipate and transition to sleep. Parents can continue to try to **fade away** during the transition to sleep to help the baby learn to self-soothe. Responding to the first sign of sleepiness prevents the over-tired state and makes the transition to nap time or bedtime easier.

SUMMARY

- Notice how curious and social the 4 month old is becoming. Continue to emphasize that it’s not spoiling to respond to cues.
- Watch for and join in moments of shared delight.
- Watch for any feeding difficulties and get extra support/help right away since early infancy is a sensitive period for brain development and for establishment of the parent-child relationship.
- Frame starting baby foods in terms of the feeding relationship
- Focus on sleep **timing**: Encourage a predictable nap ritual with fading away by the parents (if tolerated by the baby). Watch for the emergence of the much earlier bedtime and help parents protect the baby from becoming over-tired.
- Support and contain parent’s concerns to help parents be more present with their baby (parallel process).

Because they are more social and curious, babies can have more difficulty settling into sleep if they can hear people talking. They can “fight sleep” to stay up to be part of things and then become so overtired they have difficulty settling into sleep and staying asleep. Watch for subtle signs of sleepiness such as a shorter attention span or needing to be distracted or repositioned more often. Late signs of sleepiness include rubbing their eyes, batting at their head, pulling their hair and crying.

Providers—Encourage parents to watch for early signs of sleepiness, continue calming routines, and try to fade away during the transition to sleep.

More information available at [pcrprograms.org](https://www.pcrprograms.org)

Referenced sources include: Promoting First Relationships in Pediatric Primary Care, Keys to Infant Caregiving, Parent-Child Interaction (PCI) Feeding & Teaching Scales, Sleep/Activity Program and BabyCues®