

# Infant Feeding Development & Red Flags

## Typical Infant Feeding Development

**Birth to 4-6 months:** Eating is driven by motor reflexes

- This is a time when babies are Learning To Eat.
- If eating is painful (e.g. Gastroesophageal Reflux) or they are putting themselves to sleep in order to be able to eat (e.g. “dream feeding”), babies are not learning how to eat or they are learning that eating hurts. This is when babies may Learn to NOT Eat.



**4-6 months:** The motor reflexes for eating “go away”, so eating becomes a voluntary action.

- Babies now have a choice about whether they are going to eat or not.
- Babies will Learn to Eat under voluntary motor control IF eating is easy and enjoyable.

**12-14 months:** Infants become “self aware” = I am a separate person from my Parents.

- Infants now realize they can express their separateness or independence from their caregiver by refusing to do what the adult wants them to do.
- Infants are no longer passive in just letting everything happen to them. They will express their displeasure by yelling or trying to get away (or repeatedly going back to something there were told “no” to).
- This is when you may see more refusing to eat at all.
- Infants may also begin to reject being spoon-fed by adults, because being spoon fed by others is actually uncomfortable (once we are self aware).

## Infant Feeding Red Flags

Sometimes feeding gets a little off course during the development, and things don't go as planned. Here are a few “Red Flags” for feeding problems in infants.

- \_\_\_ Doesn't latch well and/or consistently to the breast or bottle.
- \_\_\_ Has a lot of milk coming out of their mouth during feedings.  
(They might soak through a burp cloth or bib with each feeding)
- \_\_\_ Coughing or choking with breast or bottle feedings.
- \_\_\_ Frequent & large spit ups, projectile vomiting, or spit up comes out of the nose regularly.
- \_\_\_ Reported to be “Hard-to-Fed” by more than one adult.
- \_\_\_ Refuses the bottle (If you need them to take a bottle).
- \_\_\_ Takes more than 30 minutes to feed.
- \_\_\_ Falls asleep during the beginning part of the feeding.
- \_\_\_ Trouble sleeping (i.e. not sleeping enough or sleeping more than expected).
- \_\_\_ Arching, crying and/or hard to hold (during, or especially after feedings).
- \_\_\_ Gagging or fussing with puree feedings.
- \_\_\_ Does not accept any purees by 10 months of age.
- \_\_\_ Grazing throughout the day (= eating every 1 to 1 ½ hours).
- \_\_\_ Does not accept any type of cup by 10 months of age.