

Scheduling Feeds

You're important, not only to yourself but to others. You have important things to do. Many of those things are scheduled. You're picking your mother up at the airport Tuesday at 3:00. You have a hair appointment Thursday at 10:00. Your workday has a definite beginning and end. So does your partner's. That means it works best to have the day's major events scheduled.

Now imagine that, on top of all that, you also need to schedule your bathroom breaks. You need to train yourself to use the bathroom every 2 1/2 hours. No running to the bathroom between times, no skipping a bathroom break because you don't feel the need. Every 2 1/2 hours. On the dot.

What? No time among the important events in your day for that kind of rigid scheduling of a trivial event? Of course not. Our day runs most smoothly when it's organized around the major events, with minor events fitting in on a fluid basis, not when it's organized around the minor events.

Our culture has come to think of feeding a baby as a major event, and there are plenty of books that tell us we need to schedule this major event in order to have our lives run smoothly, in order for the baby not to take over our lives, in order to make time for everything else. Ah, but what if feeding a baby is a minor event? If it is, aren't we allowing it too much control over our lives if we elevate it to "must-be-scheduled" status?

At first, nursing a baby is time-consuming and all-consuming. You feel as if your whole day revolves around feeding the baby, and it sounds good to think that you could schedule this major event and somehow get some control over it. Scheduling sounds like a sanity-saver.

But once you learn how to position a baby easily for nursing, once the baby learns how to latch on quickly, once the early weeks are past, feeding just isn't a major event. You can nurse while you cook, in bed, while you watch tv, or eat, or write, or walk. If your baby is given the chance to snack as he sees the need, he's never really hungry, and you can "top him off" because you want to do something rather than because he's asked, stretching the next nursing interval as a result. Or you can stall him for a bit while you finish an activity. Or you can take a quick break from that activity, nurse for just a couple minutes, and leave him full enough to wait a bit longer.

This kind of free-wheeling approach of frequent, short, flexible nursings leaves your day free to structure itself around other more interesting activities. When feeding the baby is an incidental activity, like snuggling him, everyone's day usually runs more smoothly, including the baby's... and yours.

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