



TEN STEP TUESDAY

First Day Sleep Patterns of Neonates

It's Ten Step Tuesday!

Step 8 of BFHI encourages us to teach families to breastfeed babies on cue, at least 8 times per 24 hours. But is this really realistic in the first 24 hours of life? What is considered “normal”?

When skin to skin care is practiced and the mother and baby stay together throughout their hospital stay, the term breastfeeding newborn exhibits a sleep pattern similar to the table below.

Table 7-1 First-Day Sleep Patterns of Neonates

Infant State	Time Period
Alert	Birth-2 hours
Light and Deep Sleep	2-20+ hours
Increasing Wakefulness	20-24 hours

**Often includes a cluster of 5 to 10 feeding episodes over 2 to 3 hours followed by deep sleep of 4 to 5 hours.*

The initial alertness for the first 2 hours of life is followed by deeper sleep for several hours, and then increased wakefulness and interest in breastfeeding again by about 20-24 hours of life and beyond.

So...what does this mean for the education we provide families? In the first 24 hours, parents should know to expect their baby to be sleepy. Skin to skin holding “keeps baby in the kitchen” and allows mom to take advantage of brief periods of wakefulness for feedings. Encourage mom to offer the breast with any cues and keep them together as much as possible. Expect to see a more alert baby in the second 24 hours and beyond.

**Notes for infants ≤ 37 weeks or any babes on blood sugar protocol: We still want to feed with cues, however do not allow babes to go LONGER than 3 hours between feeding attempts. If a “sugar baby” is not showing cues after skin-to-skin holding, teach mother to HAND EXPRESS and spoon-feed baby colostrum. When in doubt, always consult your individual hospital protocol for further guidance.

Source: Breastfeeding & Human Lactation, 6th Ed., by Karen Wambach & Jan Riordan. 2021.

For more information contact

Cara Gerhardt, BSN RN IBCLC, coordinator@high5kansas.org