

# Cue-based versus scheduled feeding for preterm infants transitioning from tube to oral feeding: the Cubs mixed-methods feasibility study

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**Disclaimers:** This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

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## Plain English summary

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## Plain English summary

Preterm babies who are ready to progress from tube feeding to oral feeding are usually fed according to a fixed schedule. Scheduled feeding protocols set a minimum corrected gestational age at which oral feeding may commence, and specify the rate of change from tube to oral feeding. Scheduled feeding also sets the volume and timing of each feed. A few small studies show that feeding babies according to their cues might have benefits for them and their parents; for example, babies may be discharged from hospital sooner. Cue-based feeding may help parents to understand the needs of their baby and be more involved in their care. Examples of hunger cues are mouthing movements, bringing hands to mouth and sucking. Examples of stop cues are falling asleep and stopping sucking.

We developed a cue-based feeding intervention and tested it in three neonatal units to see if a large trial could be done and if parents and staff liked the intervention. We reviewed previous research, visited three hospitals that use cue-based feeding and interviewed parents and staff about their experiences of feeding preterm babies. We developed the intervention with parents and staff. The intervention included a feeding protocol, training for parents and staff, and a feeding record.

Parents and staff liked most parts of the intervention. The training did not reach all staff, and staff and parents found it time-consuming to record every feed. Many parents and staff thought that cue-based feeding was better for babies, and parents thought that neonatal units should change to cue-based feeding. We discussed our findings with parents, staff and research experts. Based on their ideas, we recommend that the intervention is developed into an app (application) and that all neonatal units in the UK are surveyed to find out if they use cue-based feeding and if they would agree to be part of a large trial.

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