

# Defining feeding milestones in neonates helps improve quality of life

December 2 2009

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A recent study conducted by researchers and physicians at Nationwide Children's Hospital sheds new light on feeding challenges often faced by premature infants. Although the prevalence of this disorder is well recognized, the feeding milestones for infants have not been well described. The new study, published online in the *Journal of Perinatology*, defines the feeding milestones leading to these infants' transition to oral feeding based on their gestational age and explains other coexisting disorders affecting these skills.

"Feeding problems are an important area of neonatal morbidity that requires attention. It worries both parents and caregivers, and prolongs the length of hospitalization which escalates the cost of medical care," said the study's lead author, Sudarshan Jadcherla, MD, medical director of the Neonatal and Infant Feeding Disorders Program at Nationwide Children's [Hospital](#). "The nature of feeding milestones, including the timeline for the acquisition of independent swallowing abilities, and the impact of co-morbidity factors influencing these skills has not been well explained until now."

According to the Nationwide Children's study, infants who were less than 28 weeks [gestational age](#) had significant feeding delays and stayed in the hospital for a prolonged period of time. Infants who were born after 28 weeks gestational age attained successful feeding milestones at a similar postmenstrual age. This study also found that airway and digestive morbidities significantly affected the oral feeding milestone.

"Knowledge of these facts paves the way for anticipatory guidance to care providers and helps in the development of higher quality feeding plans," continued Dr. Jadcherla, also an associate professor of Pediatrics at The Ohio State University College of Medicine. "Advances in neonatal intensive care have increased survival rate, and the use of resources has also increased astronomically to improve these infants' quality of life."

Data for the study, conducted in collaboration with the Medical College of Wisconsin, was obtained by observing the feeding progress of nearly 200 infants. Collaborators tracked the age at which the [infants](#) acquired first feedings, maximum tube feedings and maximum oral feedings. Other resource usage measures included the total length of hospital stay, the duration an infant used a feeding tube and the total time they were on respiratory support.

Source: Nationwide Children's Hospital ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: Defining feeding milestones in neonates helps improve quality of life (2009, December 2) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-12-milestones-neonates-quality-life.html>

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