

“All done?”

It is often difficult to read the cues of young children who are visually impaired when there is limited or no eye contact from the child. Recent research suggests that in a feeding situation, hunger cues are easier to perceive by mothers than cues signaling fullness or decreased interest. Many caregivers focus on the amount consumed and/or a given eating schedule. Still, others watch for state changes, for example, being alert and then becoming drowsy, as a primary signal to stop.

Although there is a surprisingly small amount of literature dealing with satiation cues, there is currently an abundance of studies having to do with childhood obesity, and it makes sense that if you do not know when your child is “all done,” you may very well overfeed him or her. As a caregiver and protector, making sure that your child has enough to eat is a high parental priority. This suggests that parents might err more often in trying for a few more bites than they would in stopping too soon.

So how does a caregiver know when the child is full? Satiation cues can be blatant or very subtle. You may see just one cue, or several, over time. Here are just some of the ways that a young child communicates, “I’ve had enough”:

Blatant Cues	Subtle Cues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapid transition to sleep • Crying, loud fussing or whining • Coughing, hiccups • Refusing to open mouth • Arching back or physically struggling • Pounding tray or utensils • Throwing things • Shaking head no • Avoiding face to face position • Extending or straightening arms and legs • Big increase in hand/arm movements, such as hand behind head, up to ear, to chin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting to get a little drowsy • Frowning, grimace, lower lip quiver, pouting • Yawning, change in breathing • Slowing or pausing • Starting to take interest in other things • Change in mood • Playing with food or utensils without eating • Avoiding face to face position • Pushing food out on to lip or chin • Straightening fingers or minimal changes in arm/leg movement • Hand/arm movements not directed at food or caregiver

Blatant Cues (cont.)

- Pushing away an object (bottle/spoon/bowl/cup)
- Moving body away creating distance from parent
- Totally stop sucking
- Turning head away - big move
- Reddening of skin (usually noticed)
- Big changes in vocalization
- Big change in foot or leg movements

Subtle Cues (cont.)

- Hand/arm movements not directed at food or caregiver
- Giving a slight hand push away movement
- Turning body away slightly
- Spilling milk from mouth
- Turning head away - slight move
- Paling of skin (harder to notice)
- Whimpering, forehead wrinkling
- Minor change in foot or leg movements

Whether blatant signs or subtle signs that may mean “all done,” here are some next steps that a caregiver can try (these also address the importance of making every feeding a social experience):

- Try changing the child’s position and then see if he or she will take the breast, bottle, or another bite
- Get your child’s attention with a silly voice and face. Say something about the food (“It’s yummy – or cold – or yellow - - “). Try giving some more.
- Talk about something other than the feeding situation allowing for a break before trying again.
- Sing a song before trying more.
- Play a simple game, such as “this little piggy” or “airplane” with the spoon, to see if this stimulation encourages another bite.

Try to avoid saying “all done?” and then trying another drink or bite in the same manner. Instead, it is recommended that you try two of the above strategies. If your child is still resisting food and/or drink, consider him or her to be “all done.”

*Anthony is fourteen months old and has a significant visual impairment and limited language and communication skills. His mealtime routines include sitting in a high chair with his parents at the family table and singing during clean-up time. Anthony enjoys a variety of foods and is starting to self-feed with cut-up fruit pieces, cereal, and some crunchy snacks. He is starting to use the spoon on his own with help, and he is willing to eat anything his parents feed him. He does not refuse food, but occasionally, he will **fuss and whine** about twenty minutes into the meal. He also has started to **drop his spoon to the floor** when this fussing starts. At this point, his parents are consistent with removing the spoon so he cannot continue this behavior, but they often give him a different food which he rarely eats and may throw to the floor as well. **Is Anthony just wanting something else to eat? Or is he finished? What could his parents do to try to find out?***