

Breastfeeding Your Special Care or Premature Baby

Breastfeeding

Many special care or premature newborns do not have the energy or skills to breastfeed at first. Given time, most newborns are able to breastfeeding during and after his or her hospital stay.

What You Can Expect

- Your baby may receive intravenous (IV) fluids at first, instead of or in addition to, your expressed breastmilk.
- Your baby may need to suck for comfort or pain relief, instead of or in place of, breastfeeding. A pacifier can help meet your baby's needs.
- Your baby may be fed your breastmilk using a tube through the nose.
- You will need to use a pump to build and maintain your milk supply until your baby is able to take most feedings at your breast.
- You will receive instructions on how to use a pump, store pumped milk and clean pump supplies.
- A nurse may weigh your baby before and after breastfeeding to see how well your baby is able to drink. The nurse will use this information to help decide when and how much to supplement your baby after a feeding.
- Before you can take your baby home from the hospital, he or she will need to be able to breastfeed or bottle feed all feedings. This is so the health care team can make sure your baby will get enough to grow and develop. A lactation consultant can help with questions or problems.



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Kangaroo Care

Your baby will benefit from skin-to-skin contact (also known as kangaroo care) with you or your partner for 1 hour or longer each day.

Kangaroo care will help your baby:

- keep warm
- keep his or her heart rate, breathing, oxygen, and blood glucose levels at steady levels
- improve his or her immune system to fight infection.

(over)

Kangaroo care will help you:

- bond with your baby
- improve your milk-making hormone levels
- increase your milk supply.

Your baby may also have a faster transition to breastfeeding.

Pumping Breastmilk

- If your baby is not ready to feed at the breast yet, you will need to pump to help bring in your breastmilk.
- Pump both breasts together 8 to 12 times every 24 hour day. Do not go longer than 5 hours without pumping.
- The nurses will help you with expressing (pumping) your breastmilk and breastfeeding. Ask your nurse for a copy of "Hand Expressing Breastmilk."

Adding Calories and Nutrients to Your Breastmilk

Breastmilk is always the best food for your baby. Premature babies need extra protein and calories for growth. A fortifier is the name given to milk that has extra protein added to it. This fortifier can be added to your breastmilk to increase the amount of protein your baby receives at each feeding.

Fortifier can be added to your milk with powdered or liquid formula.

When your baby reaches the right age and weight, your baby's doctor will tell you that you can stop adding fortifier to your milk.

Transitioning to Breastfeeding

- You may need to start feedings as well as follow infant cues. This is called semi-demand breastfeeding.
- Your baby will need milk supplements after breastfeeding until he or she is mature enough and has enough strength to take full feedings at your breast each and every breastfeeding.

- Supplements may be given by bottle or feeding tube.
- The use of a nipple shield may help make latching on to your breast easier for your baby.

Stages of breastfeeding

Special care and preterm babies go through stages as they transition to breastfeeding.

- Stage 1: Tube feeding and skin-to-skin.
- Stage 2: Breastfeeding begins: rooting, licking and mouthing.
- Stage 3: Single sucks, short bursts and long pauses, able to get some milk.
- Stage 4: Longer sucking bursts and feedings, has more milk more often and supplements are gradually reduced.
- Stage 5: Milk taken from the breast during breastfeeding increases. Baby may take some larger feedings. Supplements can be reduced.
- Stage 6: The amount of milk baby can take from the breast varies, suck-swallow pattern may still be immature but can get a full feeding from the breast for some feedings. Babies often go home at this stage.
- Stage 7: Strong sucking, long bursts and breastfeeds are on baby's request or demand. Getting full feedings from the breast and no longer needing supplements. Mom can decrease or stop pumping if desired.

Please note: Older or healthier babies may start at a later stage.

Source: Nyqvist, K. (2012). Breastfeeding stages; in Supporting Sucking Skills in Breastfeeding Infants. Jones & Bartlett.