

Information for Breastfeeding Families

Breastfeeding Your Late Preterm Infant



Infants who are born “just a little early” (34 weeks to 36 weeks, 6 days gestation) need special attention. Although they are healthy, they are not fully mature and often need more assistance when beginning to breastfeed.

Special Concerns

Sleepiness

Your baby may be sleepy and difficult to awaken for feedings. Feed whenever the baby seems hungry—at least 8 times in a twenty-four hour period.

Unable to maintain body temperature

Your baby may chill easily. Skin-to-skin holding is the best way to keep your baby warm and will also make it easy to breastfeed often. When not skin-to-skin, make sure that your baby is dressed warmly and away from drafts.

Lack stamina and tire easily during a feeding.

If your baby falls asleep during a feeding, change the diaper, talk, change breasts or use other ways to keep your baby awake for a full feeding. Short frequent feedings usually work best.

At risk for jaundice and low blood sugar

It is important to feed early and often to prevent complications related to insufficient feedings.

Infections

Your baby may have an underdeveloped immune system and be more susceptible to infections. Breastmilk provides immune factors and infection fighting factors to help protect your baby.

Breastfeeding

Begin breastfeeding during the first hour after birth if your baby is stable. An early start is the best way to assure long-term success.

Hold your baby skin-to-skin as much as possible. Babies who are held skin-to-skin cry less and have less pain. Mothers who hold their babies have more breastmilk.

Feed your baby whenever you see hunger cues: at least 8 times in twenty-four hours. If you feel your baby does not empty your breasts or is unwilling to feed frequently, begin hand expressing your milk. If this lasts more than a few feedings, begin using a breast pump. Ask your nurse to provide a pump and instructions on how to use it. Pump after incomplete feedings or when your baby has missed a feeding. You may need to continue to use a breast pump for a few days or weeks after you go home.

Feed your baby frequently to assure adequate intake in the early days. Your provider can give you recommendations if temporary supplementation is needed. The breastmilk that you pump can be used for a supplement to prevent jaundice and low blood sugar.

Watch these videos to see the technique in action!

- <http://newborns.stanford.edu/Breastfeeding/HandExpression.html>
- <http://newborns.stanford.edu/Breastfeeding/MaxProduction.html>