



Breastfeeding tips & techniques:

Providing Breast Milk for Your Premature Baby



Most babies, even premature babies (born prior to 37 weeks), can learn to breastfeed successfully. Even the smallest premature babies benefit from their mother's milk—even if only small amounts are fed for short periods of time. Providing breast milk helps develop a special connection or closeness between mom and baby when separated in the NICU.

Mothers who deliver a premature baby produce milk that is slightly different from the milk of mothers who carry their pregnancies to full term. This “premature milk” is especially beneficial for premature babies and provides extra protection against some of the problems that premature babies may develop. However, breastfeeding a premature baby who is in the NICU can be challenging.

Gavage feeding

If your premature baby was born at least 32 – 33 weeks' gestation, he or she may be able to breastfeed at least some of the time. Babies born sooner than this are usually fed expressed breast milk and/or special formula through a gavage tube. The breast milk may be fortified with a special human milk fortifier.

Once you give birth, you will need to remove milk from your breasts early, often, and completely, so that your body gets the sign to produce an adequate supply. The first 2 – 4 weeks are especially important. During this period your milk-producing hormones and breast tissues undergo changes that help ensure your ability to produce enough milk for your baby in the weeks and months to come.

Producing enough milk

You may worry that you are not producing enough milk, even though you are breastfeeding on demand or pumping regularly. If you regularly plan on breastfeeding exclusively, you should try to pump every 2 – 3 hours or as often as possible. The more you pump, the more likely you are to make milk. Any milk that you make is valuable.

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Need
breastfeeding
advice or help?

It is OK to ASK for help:

REFER to the Pumping & Storage handout » CALL your doctor or pediatrician » REFER to the numerous resources listed at www.abbottnutrition.com/breastfeeding

Quality assured in conjunction with:



Help line open M–F, 8:30 AM to 7 PM ET
Call Feeding Expert: 1-800-986-8800





Pumping & storage

Ask about the NICU's policies on handling breast milk for premature babies, including:

- ... Pumping instructions
- ... Proper breast milk containers
- ... Method for labeling, storing, and transporting your breast milk
- ... Whether you should refrigerate or freeze the milk you collect at home
- ... How much milk you should put into each container

When you are ready to go home

Moms who want to provide breast milk to their newborn when they are ready to go home will need to produce at least 20 – 25 fluid ounces (~590-740mL) of milk each day. Even though this is more milk than your baby will take during the time in the NICU, it is the amount you will need at the time of hospital discharge.

