

Caring For Your Late Preterm Baby

What does “late preterm” mean?

Your baby was born a few weeks before their due date. In the hospital, your baby is called a **late preterm baby** because they were born in the “prematurity” stage but later in the pregnancy (between 34 and 37 weeks).

What special care does my late-preterm baby need?

Your baby will need to stay in the hospital for a minimum of 48 hours (2 days). Your baby’s provider will let you know if you need to make a follow-up appointment within 1 or 2 days after going home.

Good nutrition will help to develop your baby’s muscles, bones, brain, and other organs. **To help your baby grow strong and healthy, follow the steps in this fact sheet until your baby reaches their original due date, or as recommended by your baby’s provider.**

Protect your baby from germs

All late preterm babies are vulnerable to germs. To protect your baby, follow these guidelines:

- **Make everyone wash their hands** before they come near your baby. This simple step can do a lot to keep your baby healthy.
- **If someone is ill — even if it’s just a cold — don’t allow them near your baby.** Say, “I’m sorry, but our provider told us to be extra careful. Get well soon, so you can come and visit!”
- **If you are ill, wash your hands even more often.**
- **Continue to breastfeed.** Breast milk is your baby’s best protection against illness.
- **Talk to your baby’s provider about important vaccinations for you and your baby** to protect against influenza and other diseases.



Feed your baby often

Your late preterm baby needs to eat often — at least 8 times every 24 hours. That means every 2½ hours during the day or every 4 hours at night. Try not to let your feeding sessions go longer than 30 minutes. During the first few weeks of life, your baby should not be sleeping more than 4 hours at a time without being offered a feeding.

But what if your baby doesn’t wake up to eat? What if they get distracted or fall asleep too fast while eating? Here are some tips to find or create the right moment to feed your baby:

- **Have your baby sleep in your room with you** (but not in the bed with you). Having your baby nearby helps you see your baby’s feeding cues more quickly. Each baby is different, but watch for your baby to:
 - Bring their hands to their mouth
 - Move their mouth and tongue
 - Move around quietly

- **Gently help your baby wake up when it's time to eat.** Here are some tips:
 - Sing to your baby or call their name.
 - Slowly change your baby's whole body position. Roll them slowly side-to-side on a pillow on your lap. Sit your baby up and down a few times.
 - Change your baby's diaper, undress them, and put them next to you, skin-to-skin, near your breast. Have your baby in the right position as you start feeding, so you don't have to move them around while they're eating.
 - Try to be patient if your baby is slow to wake up. Wait for them to open their mouth at the touch of your breast or the bottle. Don't try to force them to feed. (Some infants do need special mouth stimulation. The lactation educators can help you with this.)
- **Keep things calm and quiet while you feed your baby.** You may need to turn off the TV and bright lights. Ask visitors to leave and ask children to sit quietly. You want your baby to be awake, but not distracted.

Make sure your baby gets enough milk

Whether you're feeding breast milk, formula, or both, you'll know your baby is getting enough if they gain about an ounce every day and drinks more milk as they grow.



If you're breastfeeding

If you're breastfeeding, you can't see how much milk your baby is drinking each time. **To make sure your baby is getting enough, make the most of each feeding session.**

Babies that are born a little early may not have a strong enough suck to get the milk they need. Also, they may be too sleepy to wake to breastfeed or may not breastfeed long enough to get enough milk. To help, do these things:

- **Hold your breast**, keeping your fingers behind the areola in a C-hold, to help keep your nipple in their mouth.
- **Compress and massage your breast** while your baby feeds to help them get more milk in a shorter time.
- **Try breastfeeding at each feeding.** If your baby is too tired and doesn't latch on after several minutes of trying, supplement with expressed breast milk.
- If your baby is too sleepy to finish breastfeeding, **supplement with expressed breast milk** and try breastfeeding at the next feeding. If you are concerned your baby is not eating enough, contact your baby's provider.

If you're formula feeding

If you're formula feeding, **feed your baby at least 8 times a day, about 2 ounces each time.** Your baby should have 14 to 18 ounces every 24 hours.

Your baby's provider may recommend a special or higher-calorie formula to help your baby receive extra calories for growth or calcium for bone development.

Supplementation

A baby born at less than 37 weeks may need extra calories, protein, vitamins, and minerals. To help them grow strong, your baby's provider may recommend the following:

- Supplementing your breast milk with formula to help your baby receive extra nutrition.
- Giving your baby a multivitamin and iron supplement to help build nutrition until your baby is eating solid foods or drinking more formula.

Please consult with your baby's provider before giving any supplements.

Pump and store your milk to increase your supply

Pumping will help bring in a good supply of milk, so your baby won't have to work so hard. Start this extra pumping right away, even if your milk isn't in yet. Some mothers can squeeze milk out of their breasts by hand (hand express). Most find that a hospital-grade double electric breast pump is faster and more efficient.

Guidelines for pumping

- After breastfeeding, pump or hand express your milk into a bottle for at least 10 minutes.
- Give your baby the pumped breast milk as a supplement after breastfeeding. If your baby did not finish the bottle, use any leftovers within 2 hours. Untouched pumped milk may be refrigerated or frozen for later use.
- Keep pumping and supplementing until your baby's provider tells you differently. Your baby's provider can help you determine if your baby is gaining enough weight and if you can start reducing how much you give as a supplement to breastfeeding or if additional calories are needed to maintain growth.



Using a breast pump

- Wash your hands before pumping.
- Pump until your flow of milk slows or stops — about 10 to 20 minutes if you're using a double electric pump. You will need to pump longer if you're using a small pump or hand pump.
- After each use, wash the pieces of the pump kit that touch your breast or the milk with hot soap water. Follow the pump manufacturer's directions.

Watch out for jaundice

Jaundice is too much **bilirubin** in the bloodstream. It makes the skin look yellow, and can make your baby extra sleepy.

Jaundice usually goes away on its own, but if it's severe, it can cause other problems. Since your late preterm baby may have more jaundice than a full-term baby, do the following:

- **Feed your baby** 6 to 8 times a day. See the feeding tips on pages 1 and 2. If your baby's feeding schedule is a lot different than this, talk with your baby's provider.
- **Keep track of your baby's bowel movements (poopy diapers):**
 - **From birth, until your baby is 4 days old**, they should have at least 1 poopy diaper every day.
 - **After 4 days**, they should have 4 poopy diapers a day. Having 4 poopy diapers means your baby is getting enough milk to get rid of jaundice and begin gaining weight.



Keeping track of your baby's poopy diapers can help to check for jaundice.

Keep your baby warm

Late preterm babies often have trouble staying warm. Their bodies have to work extra hard to warm themselves, which means there is less energy for eating and growing. Here's how you can help.

Snuggle skin-to-skin (kangaroo care)

One of the very best ways to keep your baby warm is to hold them close to you. Skin-to-skin contact — sometimes called **kangaroo care** — is especially good. Not only does it keep your baby warm, but it also helps them relax and improves their heart rate and breathing. It's a great way to get your baby to eat, and both parents can do it. Here's how:

- **Undress your baby** down to their diaper.
- **Remove your own clothing above the waist.** If you're wearing a bra, take that off, too.
- **Put a blanket over both of you to keep warm.**
- **Hold your baby in an upright position with their head turned to the side.** This will help make sure their nose and mouth are not covered.
- **When your baby is not skin-to-skin,** wrap them in a blanket and put a hat on them.

Help your baby curl up

Most babies like to stay curled up in fetal position. But your late preterm baby may not be strong enough to hold a nice, tight position. You can help them stay warmer and use less energy with the following tips:

- **When breastfeeding, hold your baby in a cross-cradle or football-hold position.** Place their hands on either side of your breast, close to their face.
- **When holding your baby, cradle them** in your arms and tuck their legs in close to the body.
- **Carry your baby close to your body in your arms, or curled up in a baby carrier.** If you are using a sling-style baby carrier, check your baby often to make sure they are breathing properly.



Skin-to-skin holding warms and comforts your baby. It also encourages breastfeeding.

When should I call my provider?

Call your baby's provider or your lactation consultant if:

- Your baby is eating fewer than 6 to 8 times every 24 hours
- After the 4th day of life:
 - Your breastfed baby has fewer than 6 wet diapers and fewer than 4 mustard-yellow stools (poops) in a 24-hour period.
 - Your formula-fed baby has fewer than 6 wet diapers and no messy diapers in 24-hours
- Your baby is consistently taking longer than 30 minutes to feed

Call the your baby's provider if your baby is becoming increasingly yellow (jaundiced), especially in these places:

- Below the belly button
- On the soles of the feet
- In the whites of the eyes