Intermountain® Healthcare

Caring for Your Late Preterm Baby

Congratulations on the birth of your baby!

Your baby was born a few weeks before she was due — between 34 and 37 weeks of pregnancy. In the hospital she's called a **late preterm** baby (or sometimes a **near-term** baby), because she was born in the "prematurity" stage but late during that period.

Your baby needs extra help to finish the growth she had inside you. **Follow the steps in this fact sheet until your baby reaches her due date.** This will help her eat better, grow stronger, and stay healthier.

A **late preterm (near-term)** baby is born between 34 and 37 weeks of pregnancy. This fact sheet will help you know what you can do to help her grow and develop until her due date.

Protect your baby from germs

All newborns are vulnerable to germs. To protect your near-term 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 him near your baby.** Say, "I'm sorry, but our doctor told us to be extra careful. Get well soon, so you can come and see her!"
- **If you are ill, wash your hands even more often.** But continue to breastfeed! Breast milk is your baby's best protection against illness.

Feed your baby often

Your near-term 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. A good rule of thumb is that if your baby is awake, he should be eating.

But what if your baby doesn't wake up to eat? Or what if he gets distracted, or falls 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.** This helps you see your baby's feeding cues more quickly. Each baby is different, but watch for your baby to:
  - Bring his hands to his mouth
  - Move his 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 his name.
  - Slowly change your baby's whole body position. Roll him 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 him, and put him next to you, near your breast. Have him in the right position as you start feeding, so you don't have to move him around while he's eating.
  - Try to be patient if your baby is slow to wake up. Wait for your baby to open his mouth at the touch of your breast or the bottle. This is better than pushing or pulling his jaw down. (Some infants do need to have 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.

Save the pacifier.

If you're breastfeeding, don't give your baby a pacifier during the first month of life. This allows breastfeeding to become well established.

After your baby's first month, feel free to give your baby a pacifier. Using a pacifier may help prevent sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

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 in the first 24 hours, and 8 to 12 times a day after that. See the tips on page 1 and 2.
- Keep track of your baby's messy diapers:
  - From birth until your baby is four days old, he should have at least one messy diaper every day.
  - After he is four days old, he should have four messy diapers a day. Having four messy diapers tells you that he's getting enough milk to get rid of the jaundice and begin gaining weight.

Make sure your baby gets enough milk

Whether you're feeding breast milk, formula, or both, you'll know your baby is getting enough to eat if she gains about an ounce every day and eats more as she grows. Follow the steps below to make sure your baby gets enough milk.

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.**

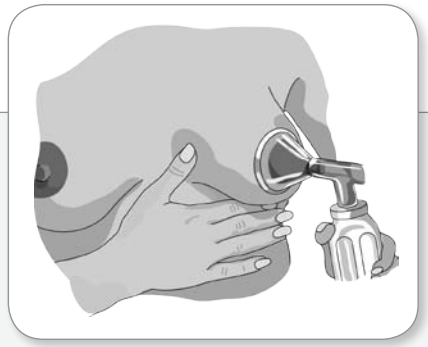
Because your baby was born a little early, she may not have a strong enough suck to get the milk she needs. Also, she may be too sleepy to wake to breastfeed or may not breastfeed long enough to get enough milk. To help her, do these things:

- Hold your breast, keeping your fingers behind the areola in a C-hold, to help keep your nipple in her mouth.
- Compress and massage your breast while your baby feeds to help her get more milk in a shorter time.
- Try breastfeeding your baby 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, it's better to supplement with expressed breast milk and try breastfeeding at the next feeding.

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 doctor can also recommend a high-calorie formula to help your baby gain weight.



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.

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 breast-feeding. Refrigerate or freeze what she doesn't drink, for later use.
- Keep pumping and supplementing until your baby is past her due date, and is gaining 4 to 8 ounces each week. Then you can gradually reduce how much you give her as a supplement to breastfeeding.

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, use hot, soapy water to wash the pieces of the pump kit that touch your breast or the milk. Follow the pump manufacturer's directions.

Keep your baby warm

Late preterm babies often have trouble staying warm. Their bodies may have to work extra hard to warm themselves — which means there is less energy for eating and growing. Luckily, you can do a lot to help your baby stay warm. Below are some ideas.

Snuggle skin to skin (kangaroo care)

One of the very best ways to keep your baby warm is to hold him 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 him relax and improves his heart rate and breathing. It's a great way to get your baby to eat, and both Mom and Dad can do it! Here's how:

- **Undress your baby** down to his 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.** When your baby is not skin-to-skin, wrap him in a blanket and put a hat on him.

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. If you help him he will stay warmer and use less energy. Try the following tips:

- **When breastfeeding, hold your baby in a cross-cradle or football-hold position.** Place his hands on either side of your breast so they are close to his face.
- **When holding your baby, cradle him closely** in your arms and tuck his legs in close to his body.
- **When carrying your baby, carry him snuggled 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 he is breathing properly.

Skin-to-skin holding warms and comforts your baby.

When to call the doctor

Call your baby's doctor, or your lactation consultant, in these situations:

- If your baby is eating fewer than 8 times every 24 hours
- If your baby is not having at least 6 wet diapers every 24 hours
- If — by day four after birth — your baby is having fewer than 4 yellow stools (messy diapers) every 24 hours
- 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
- If your baby is not gaining at least 8 ounces (½ pound) every week

© 2009 Intermountain Healthcare. All rights reserved. The content presented here is for your information only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, and it should not be used to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease. Please consult your healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns. More health information is available at **intermountainhealthcare.org.** **Patient and Provider Publications 801.442.2963 FS166 - 12/09** *Also available in Spanish.*