

Breastfeeding Your Baby in the NICU

Congratulations on your decision to breastfeed your baby! Breast milk provides the best nutrition for growth and development of all babies — whether they are full-term or premature, healthy or ill.

This handout describes the expected path you and your baby will take toward breastfeeding. The path begins now, while your baby is in the **NICU** (newborn intensive care unit). At every step, the doctors, lactation consultants (experts on breastfeeding) and nurses will support you.

Begin with breast pumping

There are several reasons for you to begin pumping your breast milk now:

- If your baby isn't ready to nurse at your breast, you'll need to pump breast milk to feed her.
- Even if your baby is nursing, you may want to pump so that the NICU staff can feed her when you're not at the hospital.
- Pumping can boost milk production and relieve engorgement (overly full breasts).

Follow the pumping guidelines below.

Use a high-quality pump

- **While you're in the hospital, get a double pump kit and electric pump machine** from your nurse. The kit includes the flanges (the plastic funnels) and the tubing that connects to the machine. When you go home, take your pump kit with you.
- **Before you go home, ask about a pump for home use.**
 - If you need to rent a pump, get a prescription from your baby's nurse. Most insurance companies will cover the rental cost. If you're on Medicaid and signed up with WIC, you can get a pump from your local WIC office.
 - If you already own a pump, check with a lactation consultant to make sure it's adequate for your needs.



Breast milk provides the best nutrition for your baby's growth and development.

Pump often

- **During the daytime, pump every 2 to 3 hours (about 8 times a day). Get a 5 to 6 hour stretch of sleep at night.** If you're pumping for multiple babies, begin by pumping 10 times a day.
- **When you visit your baby in the NICU, bring:**
 - The milk you've pumped at home. Make sure it's properly stored and labeled, and bring enough for your baby's feeding.
 - Your pump kit. You can attach it to one of the electric pumps available in the NICU. This way, you can pump while you're visiting your baby.

Breastfeeding in the NICU...and beyond

When your baby is able to start breastfeeding, the NICU staff and lactation team will help you and your baby learn to work together. They have many resources (books, videos) and tips to share with you.

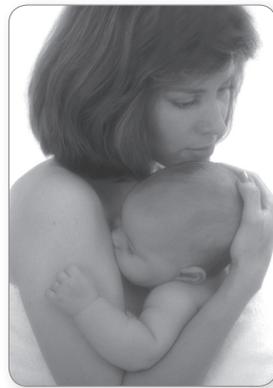
Here's what to do and expect as you begin breastfeeding your baby in the NICU.

Take the hospital's breastfeeding class

This class is offered every day. It's full of information and is a great chance to ask questions and learn from others.

Enjoy skin-to-skin holding ("kangaroo care")

If your baby's caregivers tell you it's okay, try skin-to-skin. (Skin-to-skin holding simply means holding your baby so that your bare skin touches her bare skin.) This close human touch warms and comforts your baby and helps the two of you bond. Also called "kangaroo care," skin-to-skin is especially good for breastfeeding.



If your baby is premature, follow these steps toward breastfeeding...

Once your premature baby is strong enough to suck on a pacifier, she can begin to ease into breastfeeding. (This may happen when she's about 33 to 34 weeks old according to her due date — her "corrected gestational age," not her actual age.) Here's what to do:

- First, have her practice at your empty breast. Pump your milk, then bring her to your breast. She may only lick, nuzzle, and fall asleep — but that's fine. The goal is to help her get comfortable at your breast.
- Next, have her try breastfeeding at your full breast. **You'll need to go slowly at first — breastfeeding just once or twice a day** until your baby is strong enough to nurse more often. In between these early breastfeeding sessions, you'll need to keep pumping.

Let your baby set the pace

It's common for breastfeeding to start off slowly. At first, your baby may only want to nurse once a day. (Breastfeeding is hard work!) Sometimes, she may only nuzzle a bit before falling asleep. This is fine — let your baby set the pace. Over time, she'll gradually want to nurse more often and for a longer time.

Understand the NICU's use of bottles and pacifiers

Once your baby is taking most of her feedings by nursing, she'll be offered bottles when you're not available to breastfeed. Babies often take both breast and bottles without a problem. Keep pumping and bringing your milk to the NICU.

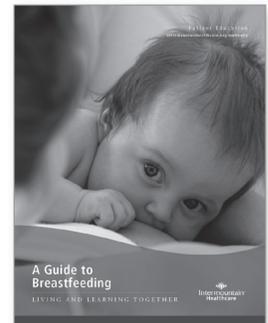
During your visit, don't give your baby a pacifier. It's best if *you* comfort your baby in the NICU. However, the NICU staff will give your baby a pacifier if you're not here, especially if she is fussy or having a painful procedure. The pacifier can help comfort her.

Get support at home

When your baby has met all discharge criteria and is gaining weight, she'll be able to go home with you. To help you breastfeed at home, please refer to

A Guide to Breastfeeding
(Living and Learning series)

given to you at the hospital. This booklet gives additional advice and resources, including phone numbers of lactation consultants you can contact for more one-on-one support.



Good luck to you and your baby.

You're off to a great start!