



ILCA's INSIDE TRACK

a resource for breastfeeding mothers

A Publication of the International
Lactation Consultant Association



Breastfeeding Your Baby Who Arrived Slightly Early

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Congratulations on your new baby! Your baby is healthy but was born just a little early. Babies born a few weeks early are called “near term” or “late preterm.” Hospitals may treat late preterm infants like full term infants. They usually go home 48 or 72 hours after they are born.

Many early babies breastfeed well the first day or two while they are in the hospital. Some seem to tire easily and then have problems after they go home. Here are some helpful tips for feeding your early baby. They are also useful for a baby who is full term and weighs less than 6 pounds (2.7 kilograms) at birth.

Getting Enough to Eat

Babies need to eat 8-12 times in 24 hours. Early babies do not always give clear feeding cues. Some of them do not act very hungry and would rather sleep than eat!

- Watch for when your baby wakes up and feed the baby right then. Babies usually breastfeed better if they wake on their own rather than being awakened.
- Watch for feeding cues such as stirring, licking and looking, and hands to mouth. Crying is a disorganized state and not a feeding cue. Do not wait until your baby is crying to be fed.
- If your baby is not waking to feed every 3 to 4 hours, wake him at 3 hours, put him skin to skin, and wait for him to stir and start rooting towards the breast.
- Watch and listen for active sucking and swallowing. If your baby is not very active at breastfeeding, you may need to give some of your expressed or pumped milk by cup or tube as a supplement until your baby is stronger and gaining weight.
- Early babies usually perk up when they get near their due date. Your baby might start nurs-

ing every 2 hours. This isn't because your milk supply is going down, but because your baby is “ready to be born.”

Skin to Skin

Spend as much time as you can with your undressed baby next to your bare skin. Skin contact with your baby helps your baby stay warm and you both rest better. If your baby is calm and warm in skin contact this allows your baby to use your breast milk calories to grow. It can also help build your milk supply.

- Put your baby upright and tummy down between your breasts. Your breathing helps keep your baby breathing, so you don't have to place your baby on his or her back like when they are in a crib by themselves.
- Your body will keep your baby warm. If the climate is cool, you can put a light blanket over both of you to keep your body heat around your baby.
- You can even keep your baby skin to skin when you are not sitting down. First put your baby inside a camisole or tank top to help support your baby's head. You can then wear a large blouse or man's shirt and tie the tails in a knot under your baby's bottom.



Baby held skin to skin inside camisole with a shirt tied under the baby's bottom.



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Your Milk Supply

Some early babies have a hard time latching on and staying attached to the breast. You can help your baby by expressing or pumping to get your milk supply started and keep it plentiful until your baby is ready to do more work.

- You can start hand expressing the colostrum (special first milk) soon after birth. This first milk comes in small concentrated amounts and is very important for your baby. Some mothers express into a teaspoon and then give it directly to the baby. Your lactation consultant, nurse, midwife or breastfeeding counselor can help you learn to hand express your milk every few hours.
- You will need to hand express or pump your milk several times daily to help increase your milk production (unless you have a large milk supply). You can feed the expressed milk to your baby as needed. Contact a lactation consultant for help.
- When you have a great milk supply and your baby is gaining weight well, you can cut down on the number of times you express or pump every day. Make these changes a little at a time.

Take your baby for a weight check 2 or 3 days after you go home from the hospital. Have a weight check at least once a week until your baby's due date.

A Breastfeeding Diary or Chart

A breastfeeding diary will help you see your baby's feeding pattern. The diary will tell you how often your baby breastfeeds and how well your baby is using the milk. It will help you know that you have enough milk. Write down:

- When your baby breastfeeds.
- When you change a wet or dirty diaper. Your baby should have at least 6 heavy, wet diapers and 3 dirty diapers (at least a tablespoon in size) every day by the 5th day of life.
- How much milk you get if you express or pump.
- How much milk you give your baby as a supplement.

Breastfeeding is the best thing you can do for your early baby. Babies who are born early do not get all the nutrients that they would receive if they were still in the womb. Breast milk provides those nutrients. It is the food that will help your baby grow in the best way possible.

FIND HELP FAST

Go to "Find a Lactation Consultant" at www.ilca.org to locate a lactation consultant in your area. You can also ask your doctor or a nurse at your hospital.

Your Local Lactation Consultant