

NUTRITION FOR

Premature Babies



Your milk is medicine.

Babies born before the 37th week of gestation are considered premature and are sometimes referred to as "preemies". Mothers whose babies are born prematurely are often scared and nervous. Premature babies have increased risk of complications. The risks increase the earlier the child is born. Any complications of a premature newborn will be addressed in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). The biggest concern parents of preemies have is the health and well-being of their fragile infant. Deciding to provide your baby with the best form of nutrition, with your own breast milk, can be very comforting during this difficult time.



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Can breast milk provide all the nutrition my baby needs?

Breast milk is the best nutrition for your baby, but in the case of extremely premature babies a mother's own breast milk cannot provide all the nutrients these babies need. Why? Because babies born early require more nutrition to grow. Often they can only tolerate small amounts of milk at a time because their stomachs are small. In these cases, your baby's caregivers may want to provide your baby with human milk fortifier, which will increase calories, protein and minerals without increasing volume. There are both cow milk-derived fortifiers and human milk-derived fortifiers available to the NICU. Prolacta Bioscience offers a full line of human milk products – that are made only from human milk – for premature babies. Remember to ask your baby's physician if a human milk-based fortifier would be best for your baby.

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Why is it important for me to provide breast milk for my premature baby?

Premature babies have an extra special need for breast milk. Research has shown that the smallest premature infants benefit most from human milk; even small amounts make a big difference. Breast milk contains nutrients your baby needs, such as protein, calories and vitamins. It also has immune factors and enzymes that protect your baby from infection and help baby's stomach and digestive tract to develop. Breast milk is also digested more easily than cow milk-based formula and fortifiers at this stage, because a



premature baby's intestinal track is so sensitive. Mother's milk helps reduce the incidence of feeding intolerance so your doctor won't have to stop feedings temporarily. If your baby is not physically mature enough or strong enough to nurse directly from your breasts, you should pump (removing, or expressing, your milk with a breast pump). Your milk can be refrigerated or frozen until your baby is ready to be fed. It is very important for you to use a breast pump regularly to both provide your baby with your milk and help you maximize your milk supply for future feedings. The NICU nursing and lactation staff can teach you about the use of a

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breast pump and the safe storage of pumped milk for your baby. By providing breast milk, your baby will receive the special health benefits that come only from human milk. At first, your baby may need to be given breast milk through a feeding tube or supplemental nursing system; however, feel comforted knowing your breast milk is assisting with the rapid development of both the brain and feeding reflexes. Check with your baby's caregivers to understand the ways you can provide breast milk for your premature baby.

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Pump early, regularly and completely.

Premature babies often can't coordinate sucking, swallowing, and breathing well enough to breastfeed at the beginning. Moms can still establish their milk supply using a breast pump. The best way is to pump early, often, and well.

Pump early: If your baby was born early, you may feel overwhelmed by your birth experience and by your baby's condition. You may be unaware of the ways you can help support your baby if he/she cannot breastfeed. Pumping is an important and significant contribution you can make to help your baby's healthcare team support your baby's health. Your milk is "medicine" for your baby. Pumping to express, collect and store (refrigerating/freezing) your breast milk, even if it's only a few drops at a time, is one gift you can provide as early as the first few days and weeks after delivery. Don't get

discouraged if you only pump a few drops at a time at the beginning. In the first few days, this thin, yellowish milk (early milk) is called colostrum. These few drops contain very important protective and nutritive ingredients for your baby. You will find your volume increasing as you continue to pump. You'll also notice the color and consistency will change. By emptying your breasts completely each time you pump, this tells your body to keep producing and that all the milk you are producing is needed for feeding. Establishing a routine as soon as possible helps mom establish a good milk supply and is often associated with a better breastfeeding outcome. Ideally, your first pumping session should be within 6 hours of birth. Talk with your NICU healthcare providers so they may give guidance to help you get started.

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Pump often: Babies grow and develop at a very rapid pace and require frequent feedings. You will want to pump often to establish your milk. Plan to pump about 8 times per day. You should pump every 2 to 3 hours during the day, and every 3 to 4 hours at night or during work. Frequent pumping is the only cue to signal your body into continuing to produce milk.

Pump well (completely): Most hospitals provide high quality breast pumps while your baby is in the hospital. If you purchase a pump, look for a quality full-size, fully electric pump. Have a lactation specialist work with you during early pumping sessions, and consider combining hand expressing with pumping to increase your milk supply.

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Safely pumping, labeling and storing breast milk.

Every NICU has guidelines and/or policies about handling and storing mother's milk for in-hospital feedings. Ask your NICU nurse for guidance. Be sure to wash your hands with soap and water before expressing or handling breast milk. Be sure to follow your breast pump manufacturer guidelines and instructions for use. When collecting milk, store it in clean containers and use one container per pumping, even if it's a small amount. Discuss with your NICU healthcare providers what storage containers are acceptable and ask if they may provide containers



(bags/bottles). Clearly label the milk with the date and time it was expressed and your baby's name. It is important that your milk gets to your baby, so clearly labeling the containers is important. When you pump at home, be sure to clean the pump parts after each use and store the clean parts in a closed container. The milk you pump at home should be refrigerated and frozen and transported to the NICU in an insulated lunch box or cooler.

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How do I make enough milk?

Ask your NICU nursing and lactation staff to help you get your milk volume established. Speak to them about using manual expression or pump expression of your milk. They can also provide education on maintaining your fluid intake and nutrition while providing milk for your baby. Another important part of ensuring breast milk production and volume is to get adequate rest, hydrate and reduce stress. It is hard to imagine a more difficult time to rest and reduce your stress than when you have a baby in the NICU, but you must try. Use your time with your baby to relax and enjoy each other. Try deep breathing, meditation, or other relaxation techniques to calm you. Your baby will respond to your cues and relax also.



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How do I make enough milk? (continued)

If you cannot produce enough breast milk for your baby, donor breast milk may be available in the NICU. Donor breast milk comes from mothers who produce more milk than their own babies need. The donors are screened and qualified to become milk donors, and then their milk is screened, tested, and pasteurized to ensure safety for your fragile baby. Nevertheless, you shouldn't feel discouraged and should continue to pump and save your own milk. In many cases, perseverance will lead to the ability to provide an adequate supply of your own breast milk for your baby. Your healthcare provider or the lactation specialists may have resources to help you with your milk production.



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Breastfeeding sources:

www.preemies.about.com/od/parentingyourpreemie/a/breastfeedingtips.htm

www.americanpregnancy.org/labor-and-birth/premature-care/

www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/recommendations/handling_breastmilk.htm

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Tips to increase milk production.

- Pump to empty each breast, pumping will increase your supply
- Eat healthier, smaller, more frequent meals
- Stay hydrated - more water and juice, less caffeine

For more information visit

<http://www.prolacta.com/premature-babies-have-increased-nutritional-needs>



For more resources visit

Prolacta's YouTube Channel.

