

# Breastfeeding Your Late Preterm Baby





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# Breastfeeding Your Late Preterm Baby

Congratulations on the birth of your baby! This booklet will help you learn to breastfeed and/or feed breast milk to your late preterm baby. Late preterm babies born at 34, 35 or 36 weeks of pregnancy are not term babies even though they may look full term. Their lungs, muscles, sucking ability, brain and nervous system are still developing. Although many late preterm babies breastfeed well, others may need more help with learning to breastfeed. Breast milk provides the best nutrients to support their growth and brain development. This booklet contains information to help you learn what to expect. In this booklet we use the term health care provider. This could be your doctor, nurse, International Board Certified Lactation Consultant, dietitian, physiotherapist, speech and language pathologist, occupational therapist, or other professional.

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*As a mother, you are the most important person to help your baby grow and develop. Being with your baby as much as possible, holding your baby skin-to-skin, providing breast milk or breastfeeding are ways you can support your new baby.*

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## Why does a late preterm baby need extra support to breastfeed?

It is especially important for late preterm babies to be breastfed and be fed breast milk. Some late preterm babies need extra support to breastfeed. Late preterm babies can have fewer energy reserves and a greater need for calories. A preterm baby's brain is not yet fully developed. That is why they require the essential nutrients that are present in breast milk to protect and develop their immature brains. Good feeding is important for your baby to grow, maintain his/her blood sugar and get enough fluids. Although some late preterm babies learn to breastfeed easily from birth others may not feed well because they:

- Are more sleepy and have fewer and shorter awake periods.
- Have a weak suck that makes it more difficult for them to get enough breast milk.
- May find it difficult to suck, swallow and breathe in a coordinated manner as they are still learning these skills.
- May not awaken for feedings and don't consistently show signs of wanting to feed, also called feeding cues.
- Tire easily and may fall asleep and not take in enough milk and calories to help them grow. Falling asleep is not always a sign that they are finished eating.

These behaviours may make it more difficult for the late preterm baby to get enough breast milk by breastfeeding until they mature and get stronger.



## Why is rooming-in or being with your baby important?

You and your baby belong together. Keeping your baby in your room with you both day and night (rooming-in) is recommended as soon as you and your baby are medically able. When you stay together, you can hold your baby skin-to-skin, get to know your baby, watch for your baby's feeding cues and respond quickly to them. Your baby will feel secure by your warmth, touch and odor that s/he recognizes.

Your late preterm baby may need to be cared for in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) or Special Care Nursery at first. You can stay with your baby there as much as possible. Throughout this booklet, the term NICU will refer to both the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and Special Care Nursery.

## Why is breast milk important for your baby?

Breast milk is the ideal food for all babies and vital for preterm babies. A mother's milk is especially suited to her own baby.

- Your colostrum and breast milk are unique to your baby. Your breast milk adapts to meet the needs of your baby and changes over time.
- Breast milk is very important for:
  - Growth and development.
  - Providing protein and fat for brain growth.
  - Providing antibodies to protect late preterm babies from infection.

*Holding your baby skin-to-skin, touching and talking to your baby, breast milk and breastfeeding all help your baby's brain to grow.*

- Babies who are not breastfed are at a greater risk for:
  - Ear infections.
  - Lung and breathing issues.
  - Diarrhea.
  - Diabetes.
  - Overweight and obesity.
  - Some childhood cancers.
  - Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Although some late preterm babies may not be able to feed directly from the breast in the beginning, breast milk is very important for them. Mothers are encouraged to hand express or pump their milk to feed to their baby until s/he is ready to feed directly from the breast.

### **Why is breastfeeding and providing breast milk important for mothers?**

#### **Breastfeeding and providing breast milk:**

- Helps mothers care for their baby.
- Keeps the hormones active that produce breast milk. These hormones help mothers cope during this stressful time.
- Promotes bonding between mothers and babies.
- Keeps mothers healthier, decreases the risk of Type 2 diabetes and some cancers.
- Is convenient and is readily available.

### **When will my baby be ready to feed directly from the breast?**

As babies mature, they develop their ability to coordinate sucking, swallowing and breathing. If your baby is showing signs of wanting to feed like rooting, let your health care provider know because s/he can help you make sure that breastfeeding gets off to a good start.

Many late preterm babies require supplemental feedings or IV fluids until they are ready to do the entire feeding directly from the breast. If you need to supplement your baby, use your expressed breast milk before giving other supplements.

Breastfeeding can be combined with other feeding methods until your baby can fully breastfeed at every feeding and is growing well.

### **What is colostrum?**

Colostrum is milk that is produced by your breasts during pregnancy and during the first few days after your baby is born. It is yellowish, concentrated and thick. Colostrum provides the perfect nutrition for your baby and helps to protect your baby from infection. It is often called 'liquid gold' because it is so valuable for your baby. Every drop is important!



# Skin-to-Skin Contact and Kangaroo Care

Holding your baby skin-to-skin is one of the best things you can do to help your baby. When your baby is held skin-to-skin, s/he can hear your heartbeat, breathing, and smell and feel your skin. This is familiar and comforting to your baby. Hold and cuddle your baby often and for as long as possible. Plan to hold your baby skin-to-skin as soon as possible after birth for continuous and prolonged periods of time. This is also called kangaroo care.

## Why is skin-to-skin contact important?

- Stabilizes your baby's heart rate, breathing and blood sugar.
- Keeps your baby warm through your body heat.
- Helps your baby's brain to grow and develop. Nerve cells are still growing in the late preterm baby. Skin-to-skin contact stimulates these nerves to grow. Your baby is in a place where s/he experiences the world through touch, smell, hearing, taste and movement.
- Helps your baby to:
  - Feel safe and secure.
  - Be calm and cry less.
  - Sleep better, saving energy for growing.
  - Be comfortable during procedures.
- Helps your milk flow and may improve your milk supply.
- Helps you develop special immunity to the germs found in the NICU. This immunity is then passed on to your baby in your breast milk and protects your baby from infections.
- Promotes bonding and getting to know each other.
- Helps you to be more confident and relaxed.



Your baby will be dressed in a diaper, then placed upright, chest-to-chest between your breasts. When you hold your baby securely against your skin, s/he will feel calm and may show more interest in breastfeeding. Your partner can also provide skin-to-skin contact to comfort and nurture your baby.

*Cuddle and hold your baby day or night for as long as possible.  
Be your baby's advocate!  
Ask your health care provider to help you learn how to do skin-to-skin!*

**Read or hear more about skin-to-skin contact and kangaroo care in the NICU.**

[www.kangaroomothercare.com/skin-to-skin.aspx](http://www.kangaroomothercare.com/skin-to-skin.aspx)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=iN1UiAVyZZk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iN1UiAVyZZk)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=svNB3yz2v8E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svNB3yz2v8E)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=MateX87u9k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MateX87u9k)

# Getting Started

## Making milk for your baby

The best way to make enough breast milk for your baby is by breastfeeding whenever your baby shows hunger cues. Your late preterm baby may not be mature enough to fully feed at the breast. If your baby is not able to breastfeed for very long, or at every feeding, you will need to help establish your milk supply by hand expressing and pumping. Both methods remove breast milk from your breast so that you can feed it to your baby. It is important to express milk as many times as your baby would feed, at least 8 times in 24 hours, including at least once during the night.

Your health care provider will help you learn how to express and store your breast milk, how to use a breast pump and how to breastfeed your baby when s/he is ready.

## Tips for getting off to a good start:

- Begin early and frequent hand expression and pumping of colostrum preferably within the first hour after giving birth and if that is not possible try to begin within 6 hours.
- Hold your baby skin-to-skin as much as possible.
- Breastfeed your baby first, then hand express and pump any remaining breast milk and feed it to your baby. Compress and massage your breast while your baby is feeding to help your baby get more breast milk.
- Breastfeed or remove milk by hand expressing and pumping at least 8 times in 24 hours. This should include at least once during the night. If you are pumping, use a hospital grade double electric pump whenever you can.
- Hand express for a few minutes before and after pumping.
- Massage your breasts for a few minutes before hand expression and pumping.
- Massage or compress your breasts while double pumping.



## How do I hand express?

To hand express colostrum for your baby:

- Wash your hands with soap and water or use waterless antiseptic cleanser before pumping or handling breast milk.
- Find a place where you are comfortable and relaxed.
- Apply warm compresses to your breasts before hand expressing, when able.
- Gently massage your breasts from the outside towards the nipple.
- Hold your breast with one hand, not too close to the nipple. The thumb and fingers of your hand should be opposite each other and about 2½–4 cm (1–1½ inches) back from your nipple. Lift your breast slightly, and gently press the breast inwards toward your chest.
- Lightly compress your thumb and fingers together without sliding them towards the nipple.
- Relax your fingers for a couple of seconds then repeat the same motion.
- Move your hands around your breast, so you are expressing milk from the entire breast. Continue this until the flow of milk slows down. Switch sides and repeat on the other breast. Continue to alternate sides, massaging the breast and express again until the flow of milk has stopped.
- At first you may get a few drops of colostrum. Don't get discouraged; this is normal.
- Collect the milk on a teaspoon or a container provided by the hospital.
- Hand expression takes practice to learn, it will get easier.

### Technique for Hand Expressing Breast Milk

**Key steps: PRESS – COMPRESS – RELAX**



**press**  
(back towards  
your chest)



**compress**



**relax**

**Watch a video on expressing breast milk.**

[www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/AudioVideo/Hand-expression/  
newborns.stanford.edu/Breastfeeding/HandExpression.html](http://www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/AudioVideo/Hand-expression/newborns.stanford.edu/Breastfeeding/HandExpression.html)

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*Expressing milk should be comfortable, not painful.*

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## How does my body make breast milk?

During your pregnancy your body also prepares for breastfeeding your baby. Two important hormones involved in breastfeeding are prolactin and oxytocin.

Prolactin is an important hormone because it makes milk. You can increase prolactin by:

- Breastfeeding your baby more often.
- Stimulating your breasts at least 8 times in 24 hours by breastfeeding, hand expressing and pumping.

Oxytocin is made while you breastfeed, hand express or pump. Oxytocin is an important hormone because it releases the milk from your breasts. This is called let-down. During let-down you may:

- Feel tingling in your breasts.
- Feel milk leaking from one or both breasts.
- Observe more swallowing as your baby is breastfeeding.
- Feel cramps or contractions in your uterus or womb.
- Feel nothing. A lack of these signs does not mean that you don't have a let-down.

You will make milk faster with frequent breastfeeding, hand expression and effective pumping!

Between days 3-5 your breasts will be making more milk and they may become firm. This is normal. If your breasts become over filled and uncomfortable, this is called engorgement. Cold compresses on your breasts and frequent milk removal should help. Many mothers also find that reverse pressure softening is useful. Reverse pressure softening is a way to soften the dark area around your nipple and this helps the milk to come out. Reverse pressure softening technique may help with engorgement.

### Reverse Pressure Softening



1. Place your fingers on each side of your nipple.
2. Push towards your ribs. Hold for about a minute.
3. Rotate your fingers around the nipple and repeat.
4. If part of your areola is still firm, repeat on that area.
5. Reverse pressure softening may be a bit uncomfortable but should not hurt.
6. Remember that you are pushing fluid away from the areola. Your baby will be able to latch better on this softened areola.

If breast fullness or engorgement continue to be a problem, be sure to talk to your health care provider.



## What can I expect while my baby is learning to breastfeed?

A late preterm baby goes through specific stages as they learn to breastfeed. This is like learning any new skill. Start breastfeeding your baby when s/he is showing signs of wanting to feed and feeding cues. Some babies are able to breastfeed once a day and others are able to breastfeed at many feedings each day. Let your baby do what s/he can, then hand express and pump. Your baby will slowly become better at breastfeeding. Ask your health care provider for help when you and your baby are learning to breastfeed. This is what you may see:

**Skin-to-skin/kangaroo care.**



**Observe your baby for feeding cues, such as waking up, rooting, sucking and putting his/her hand to his/her mouth. In addition to indicating that your baby is hungry, these signs also indicate that your baby is learning to coordinate sucking, swallowing and breathing during feeding.**



**Position your baby so that your baby's mouth is close to your nipple and watch for your baby to lick and sniff.**



**Express breast milk onto your nipple and gently rub it along your baby's lips. This will help him/her become familiar with the taste and smell of your breast milk.**



**Your baby may latch on to your nipple and begins to suck and swallow.**



**Your baby may breastfeed but may require additional supplementation until s/he can breastfeed more efficiently.**



**Stay together with your baby as much as possible. This will help you and your baby get to know one another and you will be better able to respond to your baby's cues.**



**Room in with your baby. If the hospital staff do not offer rooming-in, ask for help to do it.**

## How do I know if my baby is getting enough breast milk?

Most babies lose weight the first few days after birth. This is normal. When your baby begins to gain weight, this is a sign that s/he is getting enough breast milk to grow.

These are signs that your baby is getting enough milk:

- Your baby feeds at least 8 times every 24 hours.
- You can see your baby actively swallowing during the feed, with some short pauses.
- Your baby has enough wet and dirty diapers according to his age.
- Your baby is active and has a strong cry.
- Your baby has a wet, pink mouth, and bright eyes.

Find more information for nursing mothers on the Best Start Resource Center website:

[www.beststart.org/resources/breastfeeding/index.html](http://www.beststart.org/resources/breastfeeding/index.html)

Download “My Breastfeeding Guide” or “Breastfeeding Matters” booklet, “Guidelines for Nursing Mothers” chart and other breastfeeding resources.

| GUIDELINES FOR NURSING MOTHERS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                  |        |                                                                                                         |         |         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Your Baby's Age                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 1 WEEK                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                  |        |                                                                                                         | 2 WEEKS | 3 WEEKS |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 1 DAY                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 2 DAYS                                                                                                | 3 DAYS                                                                                                                       | 4 DAYS                                                                                                | 5 DAYS                                                                                                                                           | 6 DAYS | 7 DAYS                                                                                                  |         |         |
| <b>How Often Should You Breastfeed?</b><br>Per day, on average over 24 hours                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |         |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                  |        |                                                                                                         |         |         |
| At least 8 feeds per day. Your baby is sucking strongly, slowly, steadily and swallowing often.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                  |        |                                                                                                         |         |         |
| <b>Your Baby's Tummy Size</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <br>Size of a cherry                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                       | <br>Size of a walnut                      |                                                                                                       | <br>Size of an apricot                                       |        | <br>Size of an egg |         |         |
| <b>Wet Diapers: How Many, How Wet</b><br>Per day, on average over 24 hours                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <br>At least 1 WET                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <br>At least 2 WET | <br>At least 3 WET                        | <br>At least 4 WET | <br>At least 6<br>HEAVY WET WITH PALE YELLOW OR CLEAR URINE |        |                                                                                                         |         |         |
| <b>Soiled Diapers: Number and Colour of Stools</b><br>Per day, on average over 24 hours                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <br>At least 1 to 2<br>BLACK OR DARK GREEN                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                       | <br>At least 3<br>BROWN, GREEN, OR YELLOW |                                                                                                       | <br>At least 3 large, soft and seedy<br>YELLOW              |        |                                                                                                         |         |         |
| <b>Your Baby's Weight</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Most babies lose a bit of weight in the first 3 days after birth.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                              | From day 4 onward, most babies gain weight regularly.                                                 |                                                                                                                                                  |        |                                                                                                         |         |         |
| <b>Other Signs</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Your baby should have a strong cry, move actively and wake easily. Your breasts feel softer and less full after breastfeeding.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                  |        |                                                                                                         |         |         |
| <div><div><div>best start<br/>meilleur départ</div><div>by/par health  santé</div></div><div><p>Breast milk is all the food a baby needs for the first six months.</p><p>You can get advice, help and support from:</p><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Your health care provider.</li><li>– Telehealth Ontario's specialized breastfeeding services support line at 1-866-797-0000 or TTY at 1-866-797-0007.</li><li>– Bilingual Online Ontario Breastfeeding Services directory at <a href="http://www.ontariobreastfeeds.ca">www.ontariobreastfeeds.ca</a>.</li></ul></div></div> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                  |        |                                                                                                         |         |         |
| 2016                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                  |        |                                                                                                         |         |         |

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