

# Caring for Your Late Preterm Infant

## Breastfeeding Tips for Parents

Breastmilk is important for all infants but especially those born early. Your breastmilk is specifically designed for your infant so you are providing a great start for your late preterm infant by breastfeeding. Following is some information to guide you in caring for your infant.

### **Some late preterm newborns are ready to breastfeed exclusively, some are not.**

Late preterm newborns can be very different from one another when it comes to breastfeeding. Some babies are born ready to nurse just like a full term newborn while others are still not even ready to suck on an artificial nipple. Most fall somewhere in between. Most commonly, late preterm newborns are inconsistent in their feeding abilities, breastfeeding well for some feedings and not so well for others. The doctors, nurses, and lactation consultants will be watching your baby closely in the first days to learn how mature your baby's breastfeeding ability is. Even more important, they will be teaching you to recognize the difference between mature and immature feeding. Based on you and your baby's unique needs and preferences, your care team will help you develop a feeding plan that begins you and your newborn on the road to 3 important goals:

1. Nourishing your newborn
2. Establishing a good milk supply
3. Teaching your baby to nurse at breast

### **Observe your baby for feeding cues**

These may include licking his/her lips, rooting, bringing his/her hands to the mouth, or becoming restless and making rapid eye movements in light sleep. In general, newborns need to be fed at least every three hours. If your baby demands to be fed a bit more frequently at times, that's great. Observe your baby's natural rhythm but know that (s)he may more likely need to be wakened for feedings for several days. This can be a little tricky! Sometimes if you try to awaken your infant before (s)he is ready, (s)he will feed poorly and waiting a little longer is helpful. With experience, you will learn how to both respect your baby's rhythms and be assertive to ensure (s)he gets the nourishment needed.

### **If possible, provide your infant with skin to skin contact about 30 minutes before feeding, especially if (s)he is sleepy.**

This will regulate your baby's body systems, conserve energy for your baby and stimulate your milk supply. Providing lots of skin to skin contact is one of the very best things you can do to help your late preterm newborn adjust to the world and learn to feed.

### **Be gentle and keep bright lights and noise to a minimum to conserve her/his energy.**

Conserving energy will help to encourage a more effective feeding. Many times late preterm newborns become overwhelmed with too much stimulation. Signs of over stimulation may include: hard-to-console fussing, frowning, hiccups, yawning, finger splaying, arching the back or falling asleep.

### **Keep your baby warm but not overheated.**

This also conserves energy and helps babies to feed more efficiently. Protect your baby from drafts or being exposed to cold temperatures.

**Provide proper positioning at the breast so the baby obtains milk easier and also conserves energy.**

Baby should be supported well with pillows and should be brought up high on the breast where the nose is at the level of your nipple.

Support your baby's head and keep his/her shoulders and body in straight alignment. This will result in better head control and more efficient feeding and energy conservation.

Baby's hips should be flexed or curled around your waist. Good hip flexion helps the infant to be more stable in the upper body and therefore feed more easily and efficiently.

You may want to massage your breasts prior to feeding to stimulate milk to let down easier for your baby.

Touching the baby's upper lip with your nipple triggers the baby to search for your nipple. It may take him/her a few attempts to respond and open his/her mouth.

Continue to hold the weight of your breast central in your baby's mouth so energy is used for suckling rather than holding the weight of the breast and suckling. This once again will conserve energy and make feeding easier for your baby.

**Your baby has fed well if:**

You see him/her get into a rhythmical suck where he is sucking regularly.

(S)he is feeding at least every 3-4 hours.

(S)he has appropriate stools and voids for his/her age.

After your mature milk comes in, your breasts feel softer after a feeding.

**You will most likely be instructed on pumping to protect your milk supply until the baby comes closer to the corrected age of full term.**

It is best to use a hospital grade rental pump. Pumping at least 4x/day after feedings is usually recommended to be sure your breasts are emptying regularly. Since your baby may tire more easily, he/she may not empty the breasts with each feeding. It is best to pump after any feedings when your baby is particularly sleepy. This is your insurance that you will create a full milk supply for your baby.

**You may be instructed to supplement your baby depending on you and your baby's individual situation.**

Use pumped milk whenever possible. Sometimes a small amount of supplement will stimulate the baby to nurse by giving her/him a boost of energy.

**Your baby should be seen by his/her health care provider within a few days of discharge for a weight check.**

The pediatrician or nurse practitioner who sees your baby in the hospital will recommend when the first appointment should be made.

**Your late preterm infant will take baby steps to maturity as the days and weeks go on.**

Breastfeeding your late preterm newborn can be lots of work at the beginning but be patient. You will likely see steady improvements as your baby matures. Most late preterm newborns have fully mature feeding by the time they are close to your original due date.

Congratulations and enjoy your new little one.