




ILCA's INSIDE TRACK

a resource for breastfeeding mothers

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Expecting the Unexpected: Planning for a Baby with Medical Problems

By Kimberly H. Barbas, BSN, RN, IBCLC

You plan to breastfeed when your new baby is born, but you have been told your baby has a problem with his heart, lungs, stomach, or other body part. Your baby will need surgery to fix this problem soon after birth and will need to be in the hospital for a while. This is very hard news for any expectant parent to hear, but breastfeeding may still be possible, and your breast milk is especially important for a new baby who is going to need a little extra help at the start!

Breast milk is best for your baby because:

- Your milk is like medicine for your baby to keep him healthy.
- It helps your baby fight infection and germs in the hospital.
- It is easy for your baby's stomach to digest after surgery.

Planning ahead

Call the hospital, talk to a nurse or lactation consultant (IBCLC), and make a plan:

- Find out what kind of breast pumps you will be able to use after the birth.
- Get a list of supplies you will need to bring with you.
- Talk about your pregnancy, breast changes, and breastfeeding history.
- Plan a visit to the intensive care unit (ICU) for a tour if you can. This will show you what a baby might look like after surgery and what equipment might be used in his or her care.
- Find out if your health insurance, hospital, or other program will give you a breast pump to use when you are away from the hospital.

- Choose an electric double pump if you can.
- Learn about hand expressing milk if you will not have a breast pump to use.

Get started early!

- If it is safe for your baby to be fed, breastfeed right after birth within the first hour.
- Start using a breast pump within 4 hours after delivery.
- Ask a nurse to teach you how to use the breast pump and clean your equipment.
- Use the breast pump 6 to 8 or more times every day, for about 10 to 15 minutes.
- Ask a nurse or lactation consultant (IBCLC) to show you how to remove milk using your hands (hand expression). Hand expression after pumping will help your breasts make more milk.
- Save every drop of your milk! The early milk, called colostrum, is often yellow in color and is full of important infection-fighting cells.
- Even small amounts of your colostrum can be used to clean your baby's mouth when he or she cannot eat.

Establish a routine

- Get yourself on a schedule to pump every 2 to 3 hours during the day.
- Pump during the night, too! Do not let more than 5 hours go by without using your breast pump or hand expressing milk.
- Write things down—start a notebook or journal to remind you when you pumped and keep track of questions you have for the lactation consultant or your baby's doctors.
- Eat 3 meals a day plus snacks to keep your energy up.



What if my baby cannot eat by mouth after surgery?

- At first, many babies get their nutrition from an IV (intravenous fluid) that goes into their blood veins.
- When the baby's stomach is ready, your breast milk can be fed through a nasogastric (NG) tube—a tube that goes in your baby's nose and down to his or her stomach.
- Soon your baby can learn to eat by mouth and breastfeed. Ask for your baby's first feeding by mouth to be at your breast.

- Many babies with medical problems will need extra help feeding. Extra nutrition may be added to your breast milk and fed by bottle or tube feeding until the baby is strong enough to eat on his or her own.
- Be patient and keep practicing breastfeeding for short periods of time so your baby does not get tired out.

Congratulations on choosing to give your baby the best start with your breast milk!

Find Help Fast

An IBCLC is an "International Board Certified Lactation Consultant:" someone with special training to help breastfeeding families. 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: