



ILCA's INSIDE TRACK

a resource for breastfeeding mothers

A Publication of the International
Lactation Consultant Association



Putting Your Premature or Ill Baby to Breast

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If your baby is born early or is ill, he may start life in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) of your hospital. Most babies are able to breastfeed or get their mother's breast milk during and after a stay in a hospital NICU. Some can start within a day or two of birth. Others may need to wait weeks or months.

How will your baby get enough nutrition?

- It is important for your baby to get good nutrition to grow and heal.
- Your baby may need to be linked to tubes to help him grow and heal.
- Your baby may need to have a tube into a vein to give him fluids, medicine, and food. This tube is called an IV. The IV may be used until your baby is able to drink milk by mouth.
- Your baby may be given your milk using a tube that goes in his nose or mouth down to his stomach. He may use this feeding tube until he is able to breastfeed well directly from your breast.

Make sure your baby is able to breastfeed well

- The nurses and doctors will tell you when your baby is ready to drink your milk by mouth.
- Your baby's first feeding by mouth should be at breast. Tell your baby's nurses and doctors you want to breastfeed as soon as your baby is able.

- When your baby is able to go to breast, plan to be at the hospital as much as you can. The more your baby sucks on your breast, the faster he will learn to breastfeed.
- Hold your baby skin to skin as much as you can. This will help him learn to breastfeed more easily.
- The hospital staff can show you how to hold and breastfeed your baby so he gets enough milk.
- Breastfeeding should not hurt if your baby is breastfeeding in a correct way and is on well. He needs to have the nipple and some of the breast in his mouth.
- Some babies are not strong enough to get all the milk they need to grow by only breastfeeding. They may still need to have extra milk given to them until they learn to breastfeed well.
- The nurses and doctors will work with you to decide what is the best way to help your baby get enough milk.
- Continue expressing your milk 10 times a day. Express milk right after breastfeeding your baby. You may need to pump until your baby's due date or longer.

Tools that can help your baby get enough milk

A nipple shield

- A nipple shield is a thin plastic cover that you wear on your nipple during a feeding.
- It helps some premature babies to breastfeed better and get more milk.



- It is used only until your baby can feed well without it.

A feeding tube at the breast

- This gives your baby extra breast milk as he sucks.
- A long thin tube will be attached to a container of your milk.
- The other end of the tube will go into the baby's mouth along with your breast.
- The baby gets some milk from your breast and some extra milk from the tubing.
- The tube is used only until your baby can feed well without it.

A special scale

- The scale can measure exactly how much your baby drinks while breastfeeding.
- He can be weighed before and after a feeding.
- This can help the staff decide if your baby needs any extra milk.

Babies may also get extra milk with bottles, cups, or finger feeding. Talk with your baby's nurse about methods of giving your baby extra milk.

Most premature or ill babies learn how to breastfeed without any extra milk or devices. Be patient while your baby grows and gets stronger.

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: