



Mother's Milk for Premature Babies

Babies who are born three or more weeks before their due date need mother's milk to help them grow and develop, protect them from disease, and help with digestion. Only breastmilk can do all that. Here are some tips to help give your premature baby the best possible start.

"I know my breastmilk is the reason my premature twins are alive and well today. I know it."

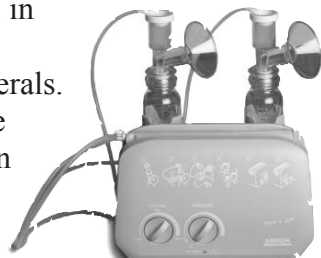
Susan Millea
mother of Hillary and Hope

The Best Food for Your Premature Baby

Mother's milk is the best food for all babies, but it is especially important for helping premature babies grow and be healthy.

Here are some ways breastmilk benefits premature babies:

- Premature babies are at higher risk for medical problems than full-term babies. Breastmilk is the only food that contains antibodies and other substances that protect babies from disease.
- Premature babies need more nutrients than babies who are carried to term. Breastmilk is rich in calories, proteins, vitamins and minerals. It helps premature babies catch up on the nutrients they missed by not spending more time in the womb.
(NOTE: If you have a premature baby, you will make milk that is higher in nutrition for about two weeks after delivery. After this time, your doctor may want to add a "fortifier" to the breastmilk your baby gets so that he or she will continue to receive extra nutrition.)
- The digestive systems of premature babies may not be fully developed. Breastmilk helps babies' digestive systems develop faster than other milk does. Also, because mother's milk is easier for babies to digest than any other food, breastfed babies will have fewer tummy aches.



Double pump

Feeding Your Premature Baby

- Some premature babies can breastfeed right after birth; others have to be fed through a tube until they are stronger. If your baby cannot breastfeed at first, you can pump your breasts using a hospital grade, double electric pump.
- Whether you breastfeed or pump, it is important to start as soon as possible and to do it often. The more you breastfeed or pump, the more milk your body makes. Early, frequent pumping will help your body make more milk for your baby later on.



Preparing to Pump Your Milk

- Apply warmth. Place a warm, moist towel over your breasts or lean forward into a sink of warm water for several seconds.
- Massage breasts before pumping. Massage your breast by using the flat of your fingers, massaging in circular motions from the base of the breast toward the nipple. Rotate around the entire breast to cover all areas. Warmth and massage will help milk flow and speed the milk-ejection reflex.
- If you massage your breasts while pumping, you will get more milk.
- If you pump more breastmilk than your baby needs, store it and use it later. As your baby grows, that milk can be used to maintain steady growth.

Pumping Tips

- Start pumping within six hours after your baby's birth, if you can. Ask your nurse to help you get started.
- Plan to pump 8–10 times during the day or every 2–3 hours for the first 2 weeks.
- After two weeks, you will not need to wake yourself to pump at night. If you cannot sleep or if you wake up and your breasts feel full, go ahead and pump.
- Pump both breasts at the same time for 10–15 minutes each session. You may only get a few drops of milk at each pumping for the first few days. That's OK. Any amount of your milk will be helpful for your baby.

Pumping schedule for a mother with a premature baby unable to latch onto the breast			
	How often?	How long?	Amount expected at each pumping
Colostrum	Every 2–3 hours (8–10 times a day)	10–15 minutes	A few drops to ½ oz.
Mature Milk	Every 2–3 hours (8–10 times a day)	Until milk flow has stopped for 1–2 minutes	½ to 2 oz.

- When your mature milk comes in, pump your breasts until your milk flow has stopped for 1–2 minutes. This will ensure all the high-fat hindmilk has been collected and your breasts emptied. If you do not completely empty your breasts, your body will make less milk.
- Set a goal to be pumping a total of 25 ounces a day by the time your baby is 14 days old. This will ensure plenty of milk for your baby.
- Follow the guidelines for breastmilk handling and storage issued by your hospital or neonatal intensive care unit.

Kangaroo Care

If your premature baby is gaining weight and if his or her condition is stable, ask your baby's doctor if you can provide “kangaroo care.” Kangaroo care is when a baby, wearing only a diaper and a cap, is placed on the parent (mother or father) — chest to chest, skin to skin, with a baby blanket over the two of them. This method has been shown to help the mother's body make more milk and help calm the baby. The nurse will check to see how well your baby responds to kangaroo care.



Helpful Resources

You will likely need extra breastfeeding management support when your baby is strong enough to latch on to your breast. Do not hesitate to ask for help. Call your local WIC clinic, a hospital breastfeeding counselor, or 1-800-SAFENET (723-3638).



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