

Breastfeeding your Premature Baby in the Hospital and at Home

Babies born very early need to stay in the neonatal intensive care unit. While they are there, they will start learning to breastfeed, and they will continue to learn even after they go home.

When can I start breastfeeding my baby in the hospital?

- You can start breastfeeding when you hold your baby skin-to-skin. Your baby will be comforted, and it will help you make more milk. At first, your baby will only be strong enough to drink a little milk. He or she will then get the rest of your breast milk through a bottle or feeding tube.
- At about 34 to 36 weeks, most babies are strong enough to breastfeed more. Babies that need extra help breathing while in the hospital may take longer to start breastfeeding.
- Your baby's doctors and nurses can tell you when your baby is ready to start breastfeeding.



How do I breastfeed my baby in the hospital?

- Learning to breastfeed your baby is hard work. At first, your baby may only breastfeed 1-2 times per day. Keep practicing! Your baby will be able to breastfeed more as time goes by.
- Your baby may need to take breaks during breastfeeding when he or she is first learning.
- Using a nipple shield can make it easier for your baby to get milk when he or she is learning to breastfeed. Nipple shields can be used in the hospital and for the first few weeks after your baby goes home.
- Remember to keep using a breast pump and do skin-to-skin care when your baby is learning to breastfeed to keep making enough milk.

Extra nutrients:

- When your premature baby is in the hospital and even after you go home, your baby may need extra nutrients added to the bottles of your breast milk to help your baby grow.
- As your baby grows stronger and bigger, he or she will need less extra nutrients.
- You can ask your baby's doctor about how long extra nutrients are needed in your breast milk.



Breastfeeding your baby at home:

- When your baby goes home, feed your baby the same way he or she was fed in the hospital. Talk to your baby's doctor about when to change your feeding routine.
- If you want, as your baby grows you can start to breastfeed more and pump and give the bottle less.
- Talk to a lactation consultant (these are experts specially trained to help you breastfeed) about any questions you have about breastfeeding.