



Mercy Health
Care first

Your important health information

Breastfeeding your late preterm or small baby

Late preterm babies are born at 34 to 37 weeks gestation.
They need more help to learn to feed in the first few weeks.
You may need to offer a breastfeed and express your breastmilk to feed your baby.

This information may also be helpful if your baby was born:

- *early term 37-39 weeks*
or
- *small for gestational age (SGA) especially if under 2600g.*

Breastfeeding behaviour

Full term babies can let you know when they are hungry and when they have had a good breastfeed:

- they try to suck on their fists or search around for the breast and then afterwards are relaxed and often sleepy.

Babies born before 37 weeks (also early term babies) may look like healthy full-term babies, but they do not yet have the same feeding behaviours.

Your baby may:

- not wake up for feeds
- stop breastfeeding before they are full
- fall asleep easily at the breast
- not take enough milk from the breast
- get better at breastfeeding the closer they get to the due date

Feeds

- Baby may need to be gently woken for feeds.
- You can offer your baby the breast when they show interest
- Your baby needs at least 8 feeds within 24 hours, that's two to three hourly.
- Aim to keep the length of the feed to less than one hour, so they don't get too tired.

Skin to skin contact

- Holding your baby “skin to skin” (dressed just in a nappy, against your bare chest) has benefits for all babies, but may be especially helpful for late preterm or small babies.
- Your body will help your baby feel calm, relaxed and warm, saving energy for feeding and growing.
- While your baby is held against your chest you may notice some feeding cues such as moving about, head bobbing and licking lips.
- You can gently help your baby move towards your breast and express some drops of colostrum onto your nipples for your baby to lick.
- Your baby may latch on and have a little suckle. Even if they are not getting much milk from feeding yet, it can still be comforting and help with pain relief during medical procedures such as a heel prick test.
- If your baby is not ready to begin breastfeeding yet, skin to skin contact allows your baby time at your breasts.

Expressing

To establish a breastmilk supply and make sure there will be enough breastmilk for your baby, you need to express. This helps your breasts work as if your baby is feeding well and feeding for longer than they actually are.

- Express after each breastfeed or instead of a breastfeed.
- Feed your baby your expressed milk after or instead of a breastfeed.
- It is recommended that you express at least 8 times in 24 hours, including at least once overnight.
- Using a hospital-grade pump is recommended and can be hired from some pharmacies and the Australian Breastfeeding Association.
- If you cannot hire a hospital-grade pump, use any pump you have access to.

See also Patient Information sheets – *“When baby does not attach to the breast”* and *“Expressing breastmilk”* and *“Pump hire”*.

Milk supply varies greatly between mothers.

- A well-established milk supply can be between 550 – 1100ml per 24 hours at two to four weeks.
- At one week of age, a full-term baby would take about 500ml in 24 hours.
- Some babies need more, some less.

Top up feeds: feeding baby extra breastmilk and/or infant formula

- Babies who are a bit too sleepy to breastfeed well will need a milk top-up feed.
- Top up feeds are usually your expressed breast milk.
- Top up feeds of infant formula may be recommended if your breast milk production needs time to catch up to your baby's needs.
- Your partner or support person could feed baby extra milk after breastfeeding while you are expressing milk.
- If you are alone, you could offer baby a breastfeed and then give extra milk as a top up.

Nipple shields

- Research has shown that some late preterm babies drink more milk when using a silicone nipple shield.
- The firm shield may help the baby to latch on the breast and remove more milk, it may not be needed for long as baby will get stronger and may latch without the shield.
- A nipple shield may be worth trying after day 4 or 5 if your milk has come in and baby is still too sleepy to breastfeed.
- Not all preterm or small babies will need a nipple shield.
- You can talk to a midwife, nurse or lactation consultant about using a nipple shield.

Your baby may need extra help with feeding in the first few days to weeks, but with time, practice, and patience your baby will get stronger and more skilled at breastfeeding.

Further Information

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact:

Mercy Hospital for Women

Breastfeeding Support Service 03 8458 4677

Werribee Mercy Hospital

Breastfeeding Support Service 03 8754 3407

Australian Breastfeeding Association Helpline

1800 686 268

Maternal & Child Health Helpline 13 22 29

Private Lactation Consultants www.lcanz.org

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