

Breastfeeding Your Early Infant

Late preterm, early term – what do these mean?

Late preterm infants are born between 34 and 36-6/7 weeks.

Early term infants are born between 37 and 38-6/7 weeks.

Full term is 39 weeks.

Why do early babies need more help to breastfeed than full-term babies?

A baby's brain, when born at 35 weeks, weighs only two-thirds of what it will weigh at 39 to 40 weeks. That's a considerable difference and illustrates why babies born before 39 weeks may need extra help. The earlier they're born the more help they may need.

Neurologic immaturity explains why he or she may initially not generate the *level of suction* needed to transfer milk well, and may have an "*immature suck pattern*": short bursts of sucks with only 1 or 2 swallows followed by long pauses (to catch up on breathing and rest). A mature infant will swallow 5 to 10 or more times (taking a breath after each swallow) and will pause only a few seconds between feeding bursts. To understand what mature breastfeeding looks like take a look at the videos (especially "really good drinking") on Dr. Jack Newman's website ibconline.ca

Why is my early baby so sleepy?

Early babies have less energy reserves as well as an immature brain which can result in excessive sleepiness. Some may do well for the first 24 to 48 hours after birth but start to have feeding difficulties (short feeds, falling asleep, perhaps even refusing the breast) when they have used up their limited reserves.

Should I supplement breastfeeding with some pumped milk or formula?

The more energy your baby has the better he or she will breastfeed. It makes sense to help your baby conserve energy (see skin-to-skin time), and avoid losing too much weight. Expressing your milk (by hand or pump) and giving this to your baby from the start can make all the difference. However, if your milk is a little slow to reach copious production (which is not unusual with the first baby or a preterm delivery) your baby's doctor may suggest some formula until your milk supply catches up with what your baby needs.

Should I wake my baby?

Babies born early may not be able to wake themselves for all their feeds. A safe approach is to wake your baby to feed after 2 hours sleep during the daytime hours (6 a.m. to 10 p.m.). Watch for rem or active sleep as he'll wake more easily. Overnight set your alarm to allow 3 hours of sleep for the baby in between feeds. Early babies need good sleep in order to feed well so waking them too frequently can be counterproductive. Please make sure your baby drinks to satiety at each feed.

How long should a feed take?

Ideally 30 minutes, maximum 45. If you are breastfeeding and supplementing with extra milk watch your baby's swallowing pattern and switch to the bottle when your baby is slowing down. Early babies have limited energy for each feed. Their little "batteries" do not hold a full charge. If weight gain is poor you may need to limit the amount of time spent breastfeeding and offer your milk by bottle for a day or two until your baby is stronger. This will not undermine long-term breastfeeding.

How much milk can my baby drink?

In the first day or two your baby may only need 1-2 teaspoons at each feed (5-10ml). However, starting on the 3rd day you can expect your baby's appetite to jump to 1-2 ounces at each feed (30-60ml). You cannot overfeed a newborn infant and the faster your baby gains weight the sooner he or she will be breastfeeding better.

Should I give my baby a pacifier?

Any time your baby shows feeding cues (licking, bringing fingers to mouth, turning head to side), offer your breast, your pumped milk or formula. Please avoid using a pacifier except for moments when your baby cannot feed, such as on the changing table or in the car seat.

Why is my baby falling asleep at the breast?

Early babies are quick to "shut down" (they appear to fall asleep) if the milk flow slows down. Your baby is not being lazy! The stronger your milk flow the better your baby will breastfeed.

How can I make sure I will have enough milk?

Frequent breast emptying in the first week is so important. This is when your breasts are calibrated for long-term production plus the stronger the initial stimulation the sooner and better your milk will "come in". Today's fully-automatic double pumps take out milk *more effectively than an early baby*, and the rental pumps can be faster and more comfortable.

Should I continue skin-to-skin time after discharge?

Skin-to-skin time with mother (or her partner or other family member) can continue through the newborn period and as long as enjoyed. Babies held this way have more stable breathing, heart rates and temperatures, sleep better and cry less so they can put more energy into growing and developing. Another benefit may be more milk production. Some parents worry that so much holding will cause a bad habit but this is not the case, so cuddle a lot!
<http://www.mommypotamus.com/skin-skin-care-guide/>

When will my baby breastfeed well?

Most babies mature into effective breastfeeding by their due dates. As development ex-utero can be slower than in-utero, some premature babies will need a month or two beyond their due dates before they can breastfeed effectively.

For more information about feeding your early baby please Google "dr. mom just a few weeks early" or try a Google search on "breastfeeding your late preterm infant".