



Care Plan for Breastfeeding Your Preterm Baby

Begin by breastfeeding once per day. Plan on a time when your baby is most alert and willing to feed. Talk with your nurse so you both can decide on the best time. When your baby is ready to breastfeed twice per day, the nurse may suggest spacing out the breastfeeding sessions so they are not back to back. Your baby may be discharged from the hospital breastfeeding 1 to 2 times per day.

Care Plan Goals:

- Breastfeed baby when feeding skills have matured
- Keep baby well-nourished and growing by providing supplemental bottles as necessary
- Maintain your milk production by pumping until baby is effectively breastfeeding

Breastfeeding Plan in NICU/SCN:

Step 1 Attempt Breastfeeding

- Attempt to get baby to latch on for 5 to 10 minutes. If baby is able to latch on and begins breastfeeding, allow him to continue 10 to 15 minutes if he is feeding (See *Signs of Effective Breastfeeding* below)
- If he is sleepy or not interested in latching on and breastfeeding, move to offering a supplemental bottle. Try breastfeeding at another feeding time
- You may need to swaddle baby to support him for more effective breastfeeding (keep his hands free)

Step 2 Offer Supplement

- Your nurse will have bottles at your baby's bedside and will talk with you about how much supplement to offer
- Finish breastfeeding and bottle feeding session within 30 minutes to prevent weight loss

Step 3 Express Your Milk with a Breast Pump

- Express your breast milk

Signs of Effective Breastfeeding:

As your baby approaches 40 weeks gestation and sometimes a few weeks after, look for these signs of effective breastfeeding:

- You will observe a long and drawing jaw drop with each suck and a deeper jaw drop with each swallow
- You can usually hear a swallow, which sounds like a soft "k"
- You may see a pulsing motion at baby's temple as he sucks in rhythmical bursts
- You do not have nipple pain
- Length of breastfeeding sessions are typically 10 to 30 minutes on a breast. Offer both of your breasts at a feeding, but some babies may only feed on one breast per session.
- Your baby is meeting his daily goals for number of breastfeedings, urines, and stools.

Breastfeeding Your Preterm Baby with a Nipple Shield

Some premature babies have difficulty latching on and staying at the breast. They may also have trouble getting enough milk because their sucking skills are not yet strong enough. Research has shown that a nipple shield can help a preterm baby breastfeed. A nipple shield is a thin silicone nipple that fits over your nipple while breastfeeding. In time, your baby's mouth will develop and sucking skills will mature so he can breastfeed more effectively. The shield may be used for a few weeks or months until your baby is able to breastfeed effectively without it as feeding skills mature.

Breastfeeding Plan After Baby Has Gone Home:

There are two very important things that you can do at home when working toward breastfeeding. First, it is important to put your baby to breast each day. Begin 1 to 2 times per day, and increase 1 feeding per week as your baby shows signs of staying awake and actively sucking and swallowing. Babies transition to breastfeeding better when they are familiar with feeding at mother's breast. Second, it is critical that you continue pumping to keep your milk production high. When mothers maintain their milk production, milk flows easily so baby is more willing to breastfeed.

How Often to Breastfeed Baby at Home:

When your baby is able to stay awake and actively breastfeed twice per day, you can add another breastfeeding session. After a week, if baby is doing well with breastfeeding 3 times per day, you can increase to 4 times a day. Increase breastfeeding sessions by adding 1 each week. As your baby matures and becomes more skilled at breastfeeding, he will be able to stay awake and feed long enough to obtain a full feeding. When this happens, he will no longer need a supplemental bottle afterward. It is important to stay in touch with your baby's doctor to make sure that your baby is gaining weight weekly when supplements are discontinued. It is also important to stay in touch with lactation consultants who are experienced with preterm babies.

TriHealth Outpatient Breastfeeding Care Center

As your baby approaches 39–40 weeks gestation, we encourage you to contact our lactation consultants to help with transitioning your baby to breastfeeding. Our International Board Certified Lactation Consultants have over 13 years of experience assisting mothers and preterm babies achieve their goal of breastfeeding. Call the TriHealth Breastfeeding Care Center (513 862 7867 option 3) to schedule an appointment for you and your baby.