

Feeding Baby with IV Nutrition

Narrator

Nutrition is the cornerstone of your baby's NICU experience. It helps them to grow and to be healthy. In time, breast milk should be the mainstay of a NICU baby's diet. But, when many preemie babies first arrive in the NICU, they'll need to be fed by what is called intravenous nutrition.

Erin Hamilton Spence, MD, Neonatologist

In the NICU, we do rely on intravenous nutrition quite a bit. So until a baby is able to take all of their nutrients in their intestines then we do rely on IVs.

So typically intravenous nutrition is used somewhere between the first two to 10 days of their life, depending on the baby. So sometimes longer for the special cases. But it's extremely important to make sure that they don't lose a lot of weight, get too dry, get dehydrated. We rely on that intravenous nutrition to help us get through the time until they can digest all their food themselves.

Susan Sward, MD

And on top of that we want them to grow. And we want their growth to come as close as possible to that they would have had inside mom, and that's pretty hard to achieve. We usually start out in a pre-term baby with IV nutrition that includes fats and minerals, and vitamins, and proteins, and carbohydrates, and that's called total parental nutrition.

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Special tubes are carefully inserted into one of the baby's veins in order to provide the correct amount of TPN nutrition.

Sue Hall, MD, Neonatologist

A PICC line is a peripherally inserted central catheter. It's a type of IV that can stay in the baby as long as a month. So the benefits are the baby doesn't have to be stuck multiple times for an IV. And also we can use a higher concentration of nutrients in the fluids the baby is receiving through that line.

TPN stands for total parenteral or IV nutrition. It's a solution that has glucose and protein, fats, minerals and vitamins. So it's a perfectly balanced solution that should be able to help the baby grow and thrive in spite of not being able to take any feedings into their stomach.

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Once feedings are started, they'll often be given through a gavage tube, which is a tube that is inserted into the nose or mouth and goes to the stomach. Then, when baby is ready, baby will be gradually transitioned to oral feeding by bottle, breastfeeding, or both. The bedside nurses will help your baby learn to feed and will monitor how baby grows.

Chelsea Yamashiro, Nurse

So we are concentrating on her feeding, concentrating on getting her ready to eat right now her main goal is to just eat and stay a hydrated baby.

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If you're able to provide breast milk, do everything you can to breastfeed and pump. However, if your baby was born very early, doctors may order special nutrients to be added to your milk to enhance your baby's growth.

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There may also be circumstances in which doctors may order special formulas for your baby, either in place of breast milk or in addition to it.

Remember: Breast milk is the best source of nutrition for your baby, so if you're able, be sure to breastfeed and pump.