

Feeding Baby with Breast Milk

Narrator

Breast milk is the mainstay of any baby's diet, especially important for NICU babies. With so many good important nutrients, it is often called "the baby's first medicine."

Erin Hamilton Spence, MD, Neonatologist

The importance of breast-feeding for babies who come to the NICU is that we view mother's milk as a life-saving medicine for these babies.

Wendy Slusser, MD

Breast milk can protect against many infectious diseases that the child might be presented with in the NICU, and the reasons are, that one: it carries antibodies that the mother has produced that are reflective of her antibodies that she has made over her lifetime. The second is it has anti-inflammatory properties, which is a more general way to protect against illness.

Narrator

Many preemies in the NICU aren't ready for breastfeeding right away.

Kara Calkins, MD

A question parents often ask is when can you breast feed. So first and foremost we have to make sure it's safe for a baby to breast-feed. So we need to make sure that the baby is breathing appropriately, if it's safe to feed the baby, we can provide them breast milk either in a bottle or through a tube in the nose or the mouth.

Narrator

Breast pumping is the way mom can begin to feed their baby even when they aren't ready to breastfeed.

Erin Hamilton Spence, MD, Neonatologist

Pumping helps you establish your milk supply and it's absolutely essential to being able to successfully breast-feed and to lactate eventually, once your baby is safe enough to breast-feed.

Shanel Villa, Mother

I'm pumping for my daughter who is in the NICU, and the benefits for her, I've been told it helps her intestines. It's like a medicine for her. There is nothing better than a mother's milk, so I'm going to do all I can so she can get out of here faster.

Jessica Sacher, Lactation Consultant

In my role here I'm primarily working with the moms to help establish their milk supply, get them pumping early on as soon after delivery as possible, and then we work with them to help them maintain and keep their milk supply.

Orly Elyashar, Mother

I actually started pumping yesterday and throughout the night I've just progressed. More and more milk has come in, which I'm very happy about. I know a lot of women who have reservations about pumping. You kind of have to suck it up and do it.

Jessica Sacher, Lactation Consultant

The pumps that we use here, they're hospital grade pumps and they're very smooth, and they're very comfortable.

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Our breast milk here is stored either in the refrigerator or in the freezer. So ideally we want moms to pump about eight times in 24 hours, and that works out to pumping about every two to three hours during the day with one four to five hour sleep stretch at night.

Narrator

Eventually baby will be ready to breastfeed with mom. There is no better bonding experience in the world.

Sarah Cohen, Mother

I started right away breast-feeding her, and it's actually a lot more challenging than I thought it was going to be. And that's again where the nurses' guidance has been just so helpful and teaching me different techniques, and just ways to get her to latch on.

I think it's a process of learning each other and getting into our groove.

Jessica Sacher, Lactation Consultant

People think that breast-feeding is really intuitive. But to actually get a baby to eat from the mother's breast in a coordinated manner is a learned process between mother and baby.

Starla Young, Mother

Breast-feeding means the world to me. It's the world to me. Can't describe it. Gets me all teary-eyed. It just gets your heart going and you feel really close to them. It's a bond I can't even describe. So it's really great.

Jessica Sacher, Lactation Consultant

When the mothers are going to go to breast- feed the first time, very often we'll start putting that baby just skin to skin with the mother. And we think of that mother's skin, like from her chest to her torso is really like the baby's home habitat, and very often those babies will start to migrate toward the breast and start looking and seeking out the breast in search of food.

Narrator

Before going home, make sure that your schedule for pumping and breastfeeding is firmly established. And if your baby is not taking all feedings at the breast at the time of discharge, have a plan for how you will gradually increase your breastfeeding at home, while continuing to provide the rest of the feedings by bottle as recommended by your baby's doctor.

Wendy Slusser, MD

One of the messages that I think is really important about breast feeding and really having a successful experience is asking for help from the get go because that's when you have a lot of people around that can help you in the hospital. So never be too afraid to ask.