You Can Breastfeed Your Preterm Baby

Breast Milk Is Special

Your breast milk is important for your baby’s health. Breast milk from mothers who have delivered early is different from breast milk from mothers who deliver at term. Some research suggests that preterm milk is higher in protein, certain minerals, and anti-infection properties. Your milk also has special factors that help your baby’s immature immune system. Your premature baby will benefit from receiving your milk in many ways:

• Lower risk of infection.
• Lower risk of necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), an infection of the intestines.
• Improved feeding tolerance.
• Lower risk of allergy.
• Better brain development and higher IQ (intelligence quotient).
• Lower risk of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), which infects the lungs and breathing passages.
• Better eye development.

Getting Started

You can breastfeed your preterm baby, but the way you get started will be different for a while. This is because preterm infants are often not strong enough or mature enough to nurse for many days or weeks after birth.
Soon after your baby’s birth, you will be taught to use a hospital-grade electric breast pump. Learning to *express* (release) your milk with a double-capacity pump helps you build and maintain your milk supply while your baby is small. The milk you collect will be given to your baby during their stay in the NICU.

**Medicines**

Be sure to tell your lactation consultant or doctor about any medicines you are taking while providing breast milk for your baby. Over-the-counter medicines, prescription medicines, and other drugs can get into your breast milk. Most medicines will not cause problems for your growing baby. But, it is still wise to review them with your health care team.

**Common Question**

Q. Is it possible for me to make milk even though my baby was born early?

Yes. Your breasts can produce milk by 22 weeks gestation.