Preventing for Discharge and Going Home

Leaving the NICU

Congratulations! You are almost ready to take your baby home. Here are some tips for discharge planning and transition to direct breastfeeding at home.

Discharge

By now, you have probably practiced breastfeeding your baby many times. During the next few weeks, while you and your baby work to make a full transition to direct breastfeeding, you may need to rent a breast pump to use at home. You may need the pump for 2 or 3 weeks beyond your baby’s original due date.

Most insurance companies will not cover the cost of renting a breast pump once your baby is no longer staying at the hospital. So, it is wise to plan now how you will pay for the rental on your own. Call your insurance provider to check your plan benefits. If you live outside the Seattle area, it might be helpful to rent a pump from a place that is closer to your home. And, if you receive WIC services, now is the time to call your WIC office to ask about a pump you can borrow.

If your baby has ongoing special nutrition needs, a member of your health care team will discuss them with you. A specific feeding plan will be in place before your baby’s discharge.

In the days before discharge, you may be offered a “guest room” in the hospital, if a room is open. This lets you stay close by and practice caring for your baby before you go home. This is a good time to work on breastfeeding.

This practice time also allows us to check test weights (see page 6 of Section 3, “Nursing Your Preterm Baby”). Weighing your baby before and after breastfeeding shows how much milk your baby is getting directly from the breast. This information will help us create your discharge feeding plan. The lactation consultants will be happy to help you with this part of getting ready to leave the hospital.
What to Expect at Home

Most times, preterm babies are ready for discharge before their original due dates. Because of this, your baby may still have immature feeding behaviors when you leave the hospital. Some immature feeding behaviors are:

- Not waking or giving feeding cues.
- Falling asleep at breast.
- Slipping off the nipple.

With this in mind, try these tips:

- Plan to continue pumping often. This will protect your milk supply until your baby is an expert at breastfeeding.

- Offer the breast when your baby is fully awake and cueing. In the first week or two at home, your baby might not be able or ready to try breastfeeding every time. As your baby gets bigger and older they will be able to breastfeed more. We do not advise on-demand feeding for a premature infant until the baby shows regular, adequate milk transfer and consistent growth.

- If a breastfeeding session is working – your baby is well latched, sucking in rhythm, and you can hear swallowing – then let your baby feed for 20 to 30 minutes. If feeding is not working, move on to supplementing and pumping within 10 minutes of starting the feeding session.

- Use the nipple shield as needed to help your baby latch in these early days and weeks at home. In time, your baby will no longer need the shield. There is no hurry to stop using the shield. Some babies will wean from the shield around the time of their original due date. Others may use the shield for a longer time.

- Use your pumped breast milk to supplement your baby. You might also need more formula if your milk supply is low.

- Between feedings, offer your baby your breast for comforting and pacifying. This is called non-nutritive sucking.

- Continue kangaroo care at home while you work toward full breastfeeding.

- Use a baby scale at home as you and your baby get close to full breastfeeding. Checking your baby’s weight before and after feeding will help safely guide you and your baby to full breastfeeding without supplement. It is important to closely monitor your baby’s weight. Your baby should gain about 15 to 30 grams each day.
Questions?

Call 206-598-4628

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Lactation Services:
206-598-4628

Weekdays:
9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Weekends and holidays:
9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

• Your baby will slowly become more efficient at breastfeeding as immature feeding behaviors are replaced with more mature ones. Your baby will probably be fully breastfeeding by 2 or 3 weeks after your original due date.

We Are Here to Help

Even after your baby leaves the hospital, you are welcome to return for a visit with a lactation consultant. We will meet with you and your baby to help work toward your breastfeeding goals. To schedule an appointment, call 206-598-4628.

Your commitment to pumping, kangaroo care, and breastfeeding is a gift to your baby that only you can give. And, this special gift will bring long-lasting health benefits to both your baby and you.