

Let's Talk About...

Caring for your late preterm baby

A **late preterm baby**, born a few weeks before their due date (between 34 and 37 weeks of pregnancy), needs extra help to finish growing. This is because they were born during the prematurity stage (anytime before 37 weeks). Following these steps can help your baby eat better, grow stronger, and stay healthier.

How can I protect my baby from germs?

- Make everyone wash their hands before they come near your baby.
- If someone is ill (even with a cold), don't let them near your baby.
- Wash your hands often, especially if you get sick.
- Continue to breastfeed your baby. Breast milk is the best protection against illness.

What are some ways to help my baby learn to eat?

- Look for cues your baby is ready to eat, including bringing their hands to their mouth, moving their mouth and tongue, or wiggling their body.
- Have your baby sleep in the same room with you (in a crib or bassinet, not in your bed) so you can notice their feeding cues more quickly.
- Help your baby wake up to eat by:
 - Singing to them or calling their name
 - Rolling them slowly from side to side on a pillow on your lap or gently sitting them up a few times
 - Changing their diaper, undressing them, and putting them skin-to-skin near your breast
- Wait for your baby to open their mouth at the touch of your breast or a bottle instead of pushing or pulling their jaw down.
- Turn off the TV or bright lights and ask others to speak quietly so your baby is not distracted.



How do I make sure my baby eats enough?

Your baby needs to eat at least 8 times every 24 hours. That means every 2½ hours during the day or every 4 hours at night. Whether you're feeding your baby breast milk, formula, or both, you'll know your baby is getting enough to eat if they gain about an ounce every day and eat more as they grow.

Breastfeeding: If you're breastfeeding, you can't see how much milk your baby is drinking each time. It's important to make the most of each feeding session.

- Hold your breast, keeping your fingers behind the areola in a C-hold, to help keep your nipple in your baby's mouth.
- Compress and massage your breast while your baby feeds to help them get more milk in a shorter time.
- Try breastfeeding your baby at each feeding. If your baby is too tired and doesn't latch on after several minutes of trying or can't finish eating, supplement with pumped breast milk.

Wait to use a pacifier

If you're breastfeeding, don't give your baby a pacifier before they are 1 month old. This allows breastfeeding to become well-established. After your baby is a month old, you can give them a pacifier. Using a pacifier may help prevent sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Formula feeding: If you're formula feeding, feed your baby at least 8 times a day, about 2 ounces each time. Your baby should have 14 to 18 ounces every 24 hours. The doctor can also recommend a high-calorie formula to help your baby gain weight.

What's the best way to pump and store breast milk?

Pumping will help bring in a good supply of milk so your baby won't have to work so hard. Start this extra pumping right away, even if your milk isn't in yet. Some mothers can squeeze milk out of their breasts by hand (hand express), but most find that a hospital-grade electric breast pump is faster.

- After breastfeeding, pump or hand-express your milk into a bottle for at least 10 minutes.
- Give your baby the pumped breast milk as a supplement after breastfeeding. Refrigerate or freeze what they don't drink for later use.
- Keep pumping and supplementing until your baby is past their due date and gaining 4 to 8 ounces each week. Gradually reduce how much you give your baby as a supplement to breastfeeding.

When using a breast pump:

- Wash your hands before pumping.
- Pump until your flow of milk slows or stops, about 10 to 20 minutes with a double electric pump. You'll need to pump longer if you're using a small pump or hand pump.
- After each use, wash the pump pieces that touch your breast or the milk with hot, soapy water. Follow the manufacturer's directions.

How can I keep my baby warm?

Late preterm babies often have trouble staying warm. Their bodies may have to work hard to warm up, which means there is less energy for eating and growing. To keep your baby warm:

- **Snuggle skin-to-skin (also called kangaroo care).** Holding your baby close to you keeps them warm, helps them relax, and improves their heart rate and breathing. It's also a great way to get them to eat. When holding your baby skin-to-skin:
 - Undress your baby down to their diaper.
 - Remove your own clothing above the waist, including your bra.
 - Put a blanket over both of you to keep warm.
- **Help your baby curl up.** Most babies like to stay curled up in the fetal position, but you may need to help your baby stay in a tight position. This helps them stay warmer and use less energy.
 - When breastfeeding, hold your baby in a cross-cradle or football-hold position. Put their hands on either side of your breast so they're close to their face.
 - When holding your baby, cradle them closely in your arms and tuck their legs in close to their body.
 - When carrying your baby, carry them snuggled close to your body in your arms, or curled up in a baby carrier. If you are using a sling-style baby carrier, check your baby often to make sure they are breathing properly.

Watching for jaundice

Jaundice [JON-diss] is too much bilirubin in the bloodstream. It makes the skin look yellow and can make your baby extra sleepy. While it usually goes away on its own, severe jaundice can cause other problems. To protect your baby:

- Feed them 6 to 8 times in the first 24 hours, and 8 to 12 times a day after that.
- Keep track of your baby's messy diapers. They should have at least one messy diaper every day until they are 4 days old. After 4 days old, they should have 4 messy diapers a day. This tells you your baby is getting enough milk to get rid of jaundice and begin gaining weight.

