

# Breastmilk/Human Milk\* and Your Baby

## Support and Information in the NICU



Safely feeding by mouth



Collecting your milk



Stages of feeding



Supporting milk supply



**CPBF** Canadian Premature  
Babies Foundation

[canadianpreemies.org](http://canadianpreemies.org)

## Let's get started!

When babies are born early they **cannot safely coordinate sucking, swallowing and breathing** because their development is immature. As they become stronger, they will be able to learn to do this.

Until your baby is ready to feed by mouth, **your milk will be given to your baby through a feeding tube**. This means collecting your milk by hand expressing your breasts and using a breast pump.

### Good to know!

Your baby's care team will help you decide when the time is right (and your baby is medically able) to safely feed by mouth.



### What is a feeding tube?

A small, soft, flexible tube that gently delivers your milk to your baby's stomach. It is carefully placed either through the nose or the mouth by your baby's nurse. It is safe for your baby.

**Collecting your milk for your baby can sometimes be challenging, but you don't have to do this alone.**

There is support from your **baby's nurse, lactation consultant, your baby's care team**, and the **Canadian Premature Babies Foundation (CPBF)** [canadianpreemies.org](http://canadianpreemies.org)

### Your milk is unique to you, and the ideal food for your baby.

Any of your milk that you can give to your baby - even drops of colostrum (first milk), will have benefits!



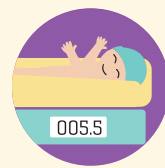
boosts immunity, provides antibodies



receives good gut bacteria



supports brain development



supports growth



*\*CPBF acknowledges the use of both the words 'breast milk' and 'human milk' in support for parents of all gender identities and family structures. In this publication we are using the term 'your milk.'*

## Collecting your milk

### Good to know!

Visit our website at [CanadianPremies.org](http://CanadianPremies.org) under **Feeding your Baby** for more information and resources, including hand expression and pumping.

It is important to begin to **collect your milk** as soon as you can after your baby is born. This will start to build your milk supply. Collect your milk by **hand expressing** your breasts and using a **breast pump**.

Starting to collect your milk will tell your body that your baby is born and it is time to make milk. Collecting every 2-3 hours, day and night, will increase your milk supply. Be sure to collect your milk at least once in the night. This is when you are most rested and when your body's hormone, that helps you to make milk, is at the highest level.

### Important!

Keep a diary or journal to track how much milk you collect, and when. This helps you create a schedule.

Your baby's nurse or lactation consultant will help you **get started, introduce the different ways that you can collect your milk**, and **provide information** about:



Preparing for and collecting your milk



Stages of milk, and building your milk supply



Storing and handling of your milk



Proper handwashing



Cleaning containers and equipment

### Good to know!

**It is normal to only get colostrum in the first few days.**

First you will produce drops of **colostrum**, the special first milk your body produces. The next stage of milk produced is called **transitional milk**, and then **mature milk**.

## Stages of feeding

**The stages of feeding below are just a guide - your baby will learn to feed by mouth at their own speed.** Every feeding journey is different and depends on your baby's gestational age, development milestones, and medical situation.

### *Important to know!*

*Hold your baby as much as you can during feeding times. If you are unable to hold your baby, ask your baby's nurse about other ways to make feeding time enjoyable for both you and your baby. This includes hand hugs, mouth care, and hands to mouth.*

### Stage 1: When your baby is less than 32 weeks

**In the beginning, your baby will get all the nutrition and fluids needed** through an **intravenous (IV)** which is a tiny tube in a vein.

Your baby will also be given a small amount (less than a teaspoon) of your collected milk through a feeding tube. The amount will increase slowly until your baby is getting enough of your milk. Soon the IV will not be needed any more.

### *Good to know!*

***Non-nutritive sucking (NNS)** is when babies suck without receiving any milk (for example, sucking on a soother or their fingers). This has many benefits including digestion, coordination of sucking and breathing, and can soothe your baby.*

### **What your baby may be able to do.**

Start **Non-nutritive sucking (NNS)** on a soother or on their fingers

Start to move their mouth towards your breast and make licking movements (while being held)

Start to lick drops of milk from your breast

### **What you can do.**

Bring your baby's hands to their mouth during a tube feeding to help make the connection between sucking and a full tummy

Give **hand hugs** during a feeding

### **Continue to build your milk supply**

Learn how to use your milk for **mouth care**

### **When you are able to hold your baby:**

Hold **skin-to-skin (Kangaroo Care)**

Let your baby lick drops of milk from your breast

*Your baby's nurse or lactation consultant can help teach and support you to do the activities above.*

## Stages of feeding

### Stage 2: When your baby is between 32 and 34 weeks

**Your baby may be ready to start slowly learning to suck and swallow milk safely.**

Your baby's nurse or your lactation consultant will support you and your baby at this stage of learning to feed. Your baby will also continue to be given your collected milk through a feeding tube to make sure your baby is getting enough milk.

#### **What your baby may be able to do.**

Show more signs of getting ready to feed such as licking or rooting (moving their mouth towards your breast)

Continue **Non-nutritive sucking (NNS)** on a soother, their fingers, and also on an empty breast (after pumping)

#### **What you can do.**

Bring your baby's hands to their mouth during a tube feeding to help make the connection between sucking and a full tummy

#### **Continue to build your milk supply**

Continue to use your milk for **mouth care**

Hold your baby **skin-to-skin (Kangaroo Care)**

Continue to let your baby lick drops of milk from your breast

*Your baby's nurse or lactation consultant can help teach and support you to do the activities above.*



### *Important to remember!*

*Collecting your milk every 2 to 3 hours will help to build your milk supply! More milk supply means it will be easier for your baby to feed by mouth when they are able. This will be more enjoyable for both you and your baby.*



## Stages of feeding

### Stage 3: When your baby is 35 weeks or more

#### Your baby may be ready to suck and swallow more milk.

Your baby will start to show more signs of being hungry such as waking for feeding, sucking on their fingers, and rooting (moving their mouth towards your breast).

Feeding by mouth is also called **nutritive sucking (NS)**. As your baby learns to feed, your baby's nurse or lactation consultant will teach and support you through all the **steps of learning to feed by mouth**.

#### *Important to know!*

*Nutritive sucking (NS) is different from non-nutritive sucking because your baby is now swallowing milk, and this pattern of sucking is much more developed.*

It is important that your baby gets enough milk as they are learning to feed. After each feeding by mouth, some of your collected milk may still be given through the feeding tube.

#### **What your baby may be able to do.**

Show more signs of being hungry  
Swallow small amounts of milk by mouth

#### **What can you do.**

Learn your baby's **signs of being hungry**  
Learn the steps to support **nutritive sucking**  
**Know when your baby needs a break** from feeding  
Know how to tell when your baby has had **enough milk**

*Your baby's nurse or lactation consultant can help teach and support you to do the activities above.*



#### *Remember!*

*Feeding by mouth can be hard work for your baby and they may show signs of needing a break. "I need a break" signs include yawning or sneezing, pushing the breast out of their mouth, looking pale or tired.*

### More ways that can support your milk supply

Simply being close to your baby can help to increase your milk supply, and also helps you and your baby to feel calm and connected to each other.



#### Kangaroo Care (or skin-to-skin)

Kangaroo care is a special way that you can hold your baby on your chest skin-to-skin which will help **increase your milk supply**.



#### Scented cloth

**Holding a scented cloth with your baby's smell can help increase your milk supply.** This is because the scent of your baby is a cue for your body that your baby is near and needs to be fed.



#### Hand hug

**A gentle way to place your hands around your baby to comfort your baby and let them know you are close.** Hand hugs can be used when you aren't able to hold your baby, and will help to increase your milk supply.

### Oral immune therapy (OIT)

**This is another way to give your milk to your baby, by giving drops of your fresh milk inside their cheeks.** Fresh milk has the most nutritional value. Your baby will love the taste of your milk, and it is comforting to them. Ask about safely collecting these drops to give to your baby.

Drops of your milk can also be used for **mouth care**.

**Ask your baby's nurse or lactation consultant how to do the activities above.**

# Making sure your baby receives all the nutrition needed.

To ensure best nutrition for growth and development, your baby may be given some vitamin and mineral supplements.



## Vitamin D

Vitamin D plays many important roles in the body, including helping bones grow strong.



## Iron

Iron is needed for babies to make red blood cells. The Canadian Pediatric Society (CPS) recommends that all babies born under 2.5 kg, and fed mostly mother's milk, get an iron supplement.



## Human Milk fortifier (HMF)

Made from cow's milk or human milk, HMF is added to milk to additionally provide nutrients that premature babies need to grow strong bones, like calcium and phosphorus. HMF also contains extra calories, protein, fat and minerals to help preemie babies gain weight.

*Important to remember!* Always speak to your baby's nurse or doctor whenever you have **any concerns** about your baby's health and well-being.



Visit us online for more information and resources on providing breast milk

CPBF  Canadian Premature Babies Foundation

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