

The Journey To Feeding Your Baby

When your baby is born prematurely, every drop of milk you can give them is precious. Your milk acts like a medicine as well as feeding your baby. Breast milk will help protect your baby against illnesses to which premature babies are especially vulnerable. There are also longer term health benefits for you and your baby. When your baby is born they may not be ready to feed straight away. So while they are getting stronger, you can pump milk from your breasts using a technique called expressing and your milk is then given to your baby through a feeding tube. Expressing is a skill that can take time to learn. The staff helping you to look after your baby will support you to do this.

Establishing your milk supply

The key to success is:

Early: This means...

- Express as soon as possible after your baby is born
 - Ideally within 6 hours of the birth, although this is not always possible
- In the first few days the amount of milk you produce will be small but will increase after a few days
- This early milk is called colostrum. It is really important as it has particularly beneficial properties.

Frequent: This means...

- As often as your baby would feed
- In the beginning at least 10 times a day
- Including at least once during the night as the milk-producing hormone is high at night

Effective: This means...

- Making sure you are comfortable when you express
 - Learning to hand express first
 - Knowing how to use the equipment properly
- Expressing until your breast is empty. Unless your breast is empty it does not know to fill up again.
 - Double pumping

Things that can help you do this are:

- Making sure you eat and drink enough
- Breast massage and hand expressing
- Kangaroo care (skin to skin care) with your baby
- Expressing at the cot side. Looking at pictures or videos of your baby while you express
- Keeping a record of when you express and how much milk there is

Kangaroo Care

Kangaroo care (skin to skin care) has many benefits for you and your baby:

- Close contact with your baby stimulates milk supply, so may help your milk production
- Having your baby next to your skin allows them to recognise the smell of you and your milk
- Helps you recognise the signs your baby is getting ready to feed orally
 - Helps you recognise when your baby is hungry
- Helps you recognise what your baby likes and what position they feel comfortable in
 - Give opportunities for early breast feeding
 - Promotes your baby's growth
 - Can help regulate your baby's heart rate and breathing.

When can I do this?

- You can discuss the best time to do kangaroo care with the people involved in your baby's care
- If your baby is not quite ready for kangaroo care, containment holding will help you and your baby be close together

Where can I do this?

- You can do this at your baby's cot side
- You can do this with your baby in any of the nurseries and for the whole of their stay on the neonatal unit.

Storing your milk in hospital

In the beginning your baby may not be ready to feed or may not be using all your milk. It is important to store all the milk that you produce. Milk stored in small quantities is perfect to use for mouth-care.

To make sure your baby gets all the benefits of your milk, it is best to:

- Use colostrum and milk in the order it was expressed. The composition changes over time and your baby will benefit the most if we give it in the order it was produced
 - When your baby is having larger quantities of milk use fresh milk when possible and freeze any that you have left over

When your milk needs to be stored in the hospital:

- It is important that it is clearly labelled and special stickers are available for this
 - Freshly expressed milk can be kept at room temperature for 2 hours
- Freshly expressed milk can be kept in the fridge for 48 hours (but not in the fridge door)
 - Milk can be deep frozen for 3 months
- Frozen milk should be defrosted in a fridge and should be used within 24 hours from the start of the defrosting process
 - If necessary, frozen milk can be thawed in a bowl of warm water. Once thawed it should be used immediately and any leftover milk discarded
- If you have a lot of milk you may need to store some of this at home and bring it in as your baby needs it
- The staff will help you manage the storage of your milk

Preparing to feed your baby

It is important to provide your baby with as many feeding experiences as you can to help them learn and get ready for feeding and swallowing.

Feeding experiences you can give your baby are:

- Using your milk when you do your baby's mouth-care. This will give them important experiences of tasting and smelling
- Allowing your baby the opportunity to suck during tube feeds. This will help develop sucking and can help digestion. This can be on an empty breast, a washed finger or a dummy dipped in expressed breast milk

Signs your baby is ready to feed are:

- Moving towards the breast during kangaroo care
 - Waking on their own around feed times
- Rooting and turning their heads when a feed is due
 - Mouthing and sticking their tongues out during tube feeds
- Trying to get their hands to their mouths and sucking their hands or fingers

Once your baby is showing these signs, we will help you:

- Make sure the environment is right. It should be quiet and calm
- Find the times when your baby is most awake
- Position your baby so you are both comfortable and your baby is able to feed effectively.

Feeding your baby at home

Initially your baby will have a feeding plan, but as they mature they will begin to guide you as to how often they want to feed and how much milk they need.

The aim is for your baby to go home 'feeding on cue'. This means they are able to show you when they are hungry, and take enough milk to allow them to grow and develop well.

By the time your baby goes home you will be able to recognise when your baby is telling you they are hungry.

Feeding on cue takes time to develop. It may be possible for us to help you and your baby fully establish this at home, with the help of a naso-gastric tube.

When you go home the family care sisters will visit you at home, and will support you with feeding.

When your milk is stored at home:

- It should be stored and defrosted in the same way as it was in hospital
 - Defrosted milk should never be refrozen
 - Frozen milk should never be thawed or defrosted in a microwave oven.