

Breast Feeding My Late Preterm Baby

What is the problem?

Late preterm babies may not eat as well as term babies. Because my baby was born before his term date, I will need to monitor his eating closely because he may **not**:

- Become wide awake and cry to let me know that he is hungry.
- Be fully awake for feedings.
- Stay awake long enough to finish a feeding.
- May not nurse well.

What do I need to do?

- I need to watch my late preterm baby closely for his hunger signals. Signs that he is getting hungry, even if he is still sleepy are:
 - Sucking on his tongue or lips.
 - Moving his hands toward his mouth.
 - Fussing or fidgeting.
 - Turning his head from side to side.
- I need to feed my baby when he is awake and hungry, before he uses energy fussing or crying.
 - Late preterm babies need to eat every 2 to 3 hours even at night.
 - Feedings are timed from the start of one feeding to the start of the next feeding.
 - I may have to wake my baby up to eat. As he gains weight and gets closer to term I can discuss letting him sleep longer during the night with his doctor.
 - Feedings should not last more than 30 minutes. Longer feedings may make my baby tired, without getting enough milk.
- If my milk begins to let down before he latches on, the milk will be ready for my baby. He won't have to work as hard to start getting milk. I can help my milk let down by:

- Massaging my breasts.
 - Pumping for a few minutes.
 - Smelling or looking at my baby.
 - Pump or hand express after every feeding until you know your baby is getting enough breast milk and is nursing well.
- I will know that my baby is getting enough milk if:
 - He is nursing 8 to 12 times each day.
 - I can hear him swallowing milk during most of each feeding.
 - My breast feels less full after he eats.
 - He seems satisfied after his feedings.
 - He seems content between most of his feedings.
 - He is having enough wet and dirty diapers
 - 1 wet diaper during the first 24 hours after delivery.
 - 2 wet diapers on the second day.
 - 3 wet diapers on the third day.
 - 6 to 8 wet diapers per day by the end of the first week.
 - Urine should be light yellow in color by the end of the first week.
 - Stools change during the first week after birth:
 - Meconium is the sticky, black stool that a baby passes during the first few days after birth.
 - Stools change to the color of mustard by the end of the first week.
 - Stools are looser and look seedy by the end of the first week.
 - The number of stools a late preterm baby has each day varies from baby to baby. My baby may have a stool after each feeding, or he may have a stool only 2 to 4 times each day.
 - The amount of stool in each diaper should gradually increase to at least the size of a quarter by the end of the first week.
- I need to keep my baby's doctor and my baby's lactation consultant appointments. They will weigh my baby at each appointment. Weight gain lets me, and my baby's doctor, know that my baby is getting enough to eat. My baby should:
 - Start to gain weight by the end of the first week at home.
 - Gain between 4 and 7 ounces each week.

- Be back up to his birth weight by 2 weeks of age.
- Many late preterm infants may need some supplemental feedings in order to get enough to eat. I should work with my baby's doctor and lactation consultant to decide if my baby needs extra feedings, and how to move to exclusive breast feeding.
- I need to watch my baby for dehydration. My baby may become dehydrated if he does not take enough milk. He is more likely to become dehydrated if he is eating less than 6 to 8 times a day, he has a fever, is vomiting or has diarrhea. I should watch for these signs of dehydration. I should report any of these signs to my baby's doctor, because dehydration can be serious.
 - Decreased number of wet diapers
 - Dry lips
 - Dry skin
 - Sunken eyes, dark circles around eyes
 - Soft spot on head may feel or look sunken
 - My baby is sleepier or more irritable
 - Weight loss

Why is this important?

If I follow the guidelines given above, my baby is more likely to get enough to eat and gain the right amount of weight.