



Breastfeeding Your Premature Infant

The mother of a premature infant cares for her baby in many ways. Providing breast milk – either by nursing your baby at the breast or by pumping your milk – is important in the care and feeding of your baby. Breastfeeding for even a short time, or pumping milk in small amounts, still provides benefits for your baby’s health and development.

Breast milk has properties that make it the perfect first food for a premature baby. Colostrum, which is the early breast milk produced by mothers in the first few days following birth, is especially important for premature babies. Colostrum contains a high amount of antibodies that can help protect your baby from some infections.

Many premature babies are not able to nurse at the breast at first. Until your baby is able to nurse, you can express your milk by pumping. This not only provides milk that can be given to your baby, it also helps you establish and maintain a supply of milk for the weeks to come.

The nurses and lactation consultants at BIDMC will provide support and help as you learn to express your milk and as your baby begins breastfeeding.

Opportunities for mothers of premature infants

Before your baby arrives	After your baby is born
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Discuss your plans for feeding with your nurse. ❖ Discuss breastfeeding with the NICU clinician. ❖ Review the letter from the NICU Physicians. ❖ Meet with a lactation consultant (a specialist in breastfeeding premature babies) to review “Breastmilk for your baby: pumping your milk” handout. ❖ Tour the NICU. Your nurse or lactation consultant can assist you in arranging this. ❖ Watch the DVD, “A Premie Needs his Mother: First Steps to Breastfeeding your Premature Baby.” Your nurse or lactation consultation can make the DVD available for your use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Begin hand expressing and / or pumping your milk within 6 hours after your baby is born. ❖ Meet with a lactation consultant. ❖ Obtain a medical-grade electric breast pump to use at home. Your nurse or lactation consultant is available to assist you with pump rental information. ❖ Attend a support group for mothers of premature infants. In the NICU, the mothers’ group meets in the Family Resource Room. Ask your lactation consultant or NICU nurse for more information. ❖ Get additional support. Taking care of your baby also means taking care of yourself. Find out about and use the many resources that are available, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CarePages – a free website to communicate with family and friends: www.carepages.com ○ Lotsa Helping Hands – an online calendar that helps your support network schedule the help you need: www.lotsahelpinghands.com