

Feeding your baby in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

Information to help with decisions

Parents have many questions about feeding their babies. Your health care providers are listening and will answer your questions accurately and thoughtfully. We provide patients with information from current studies that help them with decisions about how to feed their baby.

Many parents want to breastfeed their baby but some need to supplement for personal or medical reasons. Usually your own milk is best for your baby, especially in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit [NICU]. Sometimes additional nutrients may be added to your breast milk. Sometimes a supplement is needed. Formula or donor milk (where available) may be given.

How do babies benefit from breast milk?

Studies show that babies who receive any breast milk have more **protection from**:

- Diarrhea and vomiting
- Colds, flus, ear infections, chest infections
- Diabetes, obesity, heart disease and stroke
- Some childhood cancers
- Bowel conditions
- Sudden infant death syndrome

Mothers who breastfeed their babies or provide mother's milk by expressing and pumping have increased protection against:

- Diabetes
- Bleeding problems after delivery
- Breast cancer before menopause
- Ovarian cancer

Why is breast milk important for premature or sick babies?

Studies tell us that the first milk, called colostrum, is especially important for babies in the NICU. Human milk has been shown to reduce the risk of necrotizing enterocolitis [NEC], a serious bowel condition that can affect babies born prematurely. Even very small amounts of colostrum and breast milk help these babies grow and protect them from infection.

How can I give my baby breast milk if he or she cannot breastfeed?

Many babies in the NICU are not able to directly breastfeed, however they may still be able to receive breast milk. Hand expression is the best way to provide breast milk for your baby in the beginning. A breast pump may also be used if you need to express over a longer period of time. Your nurse or lactation consultant can help you learn how to express, pump, and later latch your baby when they are able to breastfeed. Just as a baby would need to feed about 8 times each day, it is important to express or pump the same number of times to establish a good milk supply.

Skin-to-skin

However your baby is fed in the NICU, remember to spend daily skin-to-skin (S2S) time. Your baby should be naked, wearing only a diaper allowing for as much skin contact as possible. S2S improves your baby's development, supports bonding and improves milk supply.

Additional Resources

Websites

Fraser Health website: <http://www.fraserhealth.ca/nicu>

Healthy Families BC website: <https://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/parenting>

Pamphlets and Tools

Breastfeeding and Breast milk

Available from the Fraser Health Patient Education Catalogue:
<https://patienteduc.fraserhealth.ca>

Feeding Your Baby (0 – 6 months). Search by title, or ID #26058
Expressing Your Breast Milk: Getting Started When Your Baby is in the Hospital (Catalogue #37673)

Ask your nurse for a copy:

Breast milk Expression Log
Fraser Health Pump Rental List

Infant Formula

Available from the Fraser Health Patient Education Catalogue:
<https://patienteduc.fraserhealth.ca>

Formula Feeding Your Baby: Getting Started - HealthLinkBC File 69a (Catalogue #9107)

Formula Feeding Your Baby: Safely Preparing and Storing Formula -HealthLinkBC File 69b (Catalogue #9113)

Formula Feeding Your Baby-Birth to 6 months (Catalogue #27978)
