

Feeding Your Premature Baby Safely

External pacing with bottle feeding

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

Premature babies learning to feed with a bottle often have trouble with sucking, swallowing and breathing.

External pacing is one way you can make sure your baby is able to breathe well while feeding from a bottle.

Why is external pacing important?

When premature babies learn to feed from a bottle they may suck continuously from the bottle without stopping to breathe.

When this happens, the baby's oxygen levels can drop, their heart rate can slow down, or they can stop breathing.

Using external pacing allows you to control the baby's sucking and breathing and keep your baby safe.

How to feed using external pacing

1. Introduce the bottle and allow the baby to suck for 3 to 5 sucks.

2. Tilt the bottle down so that the milk is no longer filling the nipple but the nipple remains in baby's mouth.



3. Wait for the baby to stop sucking and then take a few deep breaths.

4. Once baby is breathing easily again, tilt the bottle back up so the milk fills the nipple and baby begins to suck again.

5. Continue this process until the baby has finished feeding, or they begin to take breathing breaks on their own.

What to do if baby still has trouble

Some babies will continue to have trouble breathing despite tilting the flow of milk away. This can happen if they do not stop sucking to take breaths.

When this happens, completely remove the nipple of the bottle from the baby's mouth instead of tilting the bottle down. Then, reintroduce the bottle after the baby has taken some deep breaths. Watch your baby closely while feeding.

Find out more about external pacing

Talk to your Speech-Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, or nurse for more information.