

# Help Your Premature Baby Practice Sucking

## Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

Your baby is not ready to eat by mouth yet, but can practice sucking with a finger, soother, or empty breast.

Sucking can help your baby digest their tube feeds and learn how to latch to the breast or a bottle when they are ready to eat food by mouth.

### How to hold your baby

Help your baby get ready for sucking by swaddling baby so that shoulders, hips, and legs are close to the body. Leave baby's hands free. Bring baby's hands close to their mouth so they can suck on their finger if able.

### Skin to skin contact

Undress your baby so that they are only wearing a diaper. Bring your baby to your chest so that their tummy is lying on your bare skin. Your body heat will keep your baby warm.

Allow your baby to explore your nipple by smelling, licking, nuzzling, and sucking. Even if they do not achieve a good latch and suck, this is still great practice. This will also help your milk come in.

### Finger or soother sucking

Here are the steps to follow when helping your baby.

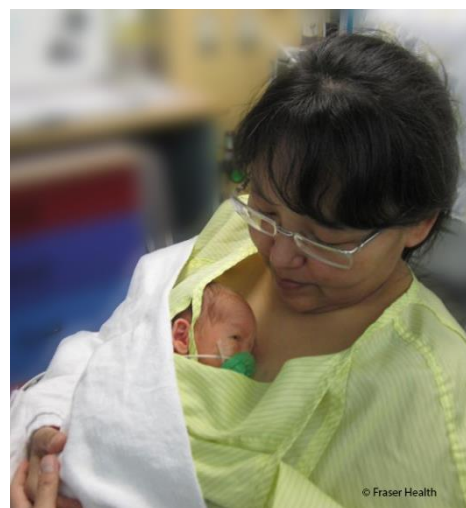
1. Gently stroke your baby's face from ear to lips with your finger or a soother.
2. If baby remains calm, offer a finger or soother by brushing it against their lips.
3. When baby opens their mouth, place the soother or finger on top of the tongue.

Help your baby practice sucking during a tube feed and for 5 to 10 minutes after a tube feed. This will help them digest their food.

Your baby will let you know they enjoy these times by staying calm and continuing to suck.

### Empty breast sucking

You may be asked to pump before putting baby to your breast. This is because baby may not be ready to swallow milk yet.



Skin to skin and soother sucking