

Newborn Care Centre: Feeding your Baby

March 2023

Milk Feeds

Human breast milk is the perfect food for your baby. It has the right nutrition to support their growth and development and changes as they grow. The nutrition in both colostrum and mature breast milk is easy for your baby to digest and absorb. Breast milk contains many protective factors that support your baby's immune system and help prevent infections. Babies receiving breast milk have fewer digestive issues, ear and lung infections, and are at a lower risk of developing diabetes and obesity later in life.

Human breast milk is so important for high-risk infants (those born less than 32 weeks' gestation and/or less than 1,500 grams). If their mother has insufficient milk supply or it is unavailable, the NCC Lactation Service is able to provide pasteurised donor human milk from the Australian Red Cross Lifeblood Milk Bank.

Most of the preterm babies in the NCC will receive their initial feeds via a nasogastric (NG) tube. The volume of milk given via the NG tube is calculated daily, as part of your baby's care plan and will increase as they grow. As part of Family Integrated Care, you are encouraged to take part in the process of drawing up and administering these feeds. Ask your baby's bedside nurse to help you learn how to do this.

Expressing

When a mother and baby are separated at birth, it is important for the mother to commence expressing her breasts within 1-2 hours of the birth of her baby, then 7-8 times in 24 hours (day and night). Your midwife is able to help you with this and there are first expression kits available for you to use. The NCC has a dedicated Lactation Consultant to provide ongoing education and support. If you need additional support, you can ask a member of the nursing team to page the Lactation

Consultant to visit you in NCC, antenatal or postnatal ward (if still an inpatient).

All postnatal inpatient mothers have access to hospital grade breast pumps on their ward. The NCC also has a dedicated 'Expressing Room' where you can express. If you prefer, you can take a hospital pump to your baby's bedside. In the Expressing Room you will find disposable expressing kits (must be disposed after 24 hours' use) to use with the hospital breast pumps, and single use bottles in which to store your expressed milk. Please ask a nurse if there aren't any expressing kits or bottles in the room.

You will require a breast pump for use at home, for expressing when away from the NCC and overnight. Please ask the NCC Lactation Consultant for advice on hiring and/or purchasing a breast pump. It is recommended to source a breast pump in advance of your discharge from the postnatal ward, to ensure your milk supply can be maintained.

For your breast milk to be used, it is essential that it is labelled with the time and date it is expressed. Within the NCC your expressed breast milk (EBM) is stored in a dedicated milk fridge. Your bedside nurse will show you how to check your milk in and where to find your baby's section of the fridge – there will be a labelled basket for you to use. There is a freezer in the NCC for the storage of extra EBM. Many mothers will need to store some EBM in the freezer – ask a nurse for a freezer spot and basket for your EBM bottles. Thank you for understanding that there is limited space in the fridges and freezer. Because of this you may be asked to take some of your EBM home. Expressed milk can be stored for 3 months in your home freezer. If you are asked to take some milk home, please ask a member of the nursing team for guidance on which bottles to remove and how to best transport these.



A mother administering a nasogastric tube feed while enjoying Kangaroo Care with her baby

Most babies in the NCC are not doing all suck feeds until just before they go home.

The NCC Lactation Consultant is on hand to provide additional support and resources.

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding may be challenging if your baby is born preterm and/or is very small, but with patience, knowledge, and assistance you and your baby will master the skills required. Breastfeeding is baby-led, and early feeding cues often start while you are having skin to skin cuddles.

When your baby is ready, you will be supported to initiate breastfeeding. Having yourself and your baby in a good position is important, as this will make it easier for them to latch to your breast. Your nurses can guide you in how to position and breastfeed your baby.

When commencing breastfeeding, preterm babies generally start with only one breastfeeding attempt each day. After your baby does this well for a couple of days and has extra energy, breastfeeds are increased to twice a day. It often helps if your baby has a NG tube feed between breastfeeds, as this allows them to rest. When your baby is doing two good breastfeeds per day for a couple of days and has extra energy, breastfeeds will be increased to three times a day. Generally, when a baby is doing three good breastfeeds per day well and is looking to feed overnight, the team will talk with you about introducing a bottle feed overnight.

Updated February 2023. Endorsed 21 October 2021. Reviewed by clinicians and consumers in development stage July to August 2021. Should you wish to discuss any aspect of this information please send an email to portal@royalwomen.org.au