



# ILCA's INSIDE TRACK

*a resource for breastfeeding mothers*

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## **Tips for Breastfeeding Your Premature Baby**

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**Y**our milk is the best thing for your premature (“premie”) baby. Breastfeeding a premie baby takes time and patience. It may be easier if you know why your baby acts the way he does.

### **When will my premature baby be ready for breastfeeding?**

- Your premie is ready to breastfeed when he can suck, swallow, and breathe on his own.
- Your premie will have a good heart beat, easy breathing, and good skin color.
- Babies have 6 different ways of acting, from deep sleep to crying.<sup>1</sup>
  1. Deep sleep: No eye movement, no body movement, steady breathing
  2. Light sleep: Some eye and body movement
  3. Drowsy: Heavy eyelids that open and close, some body movement
  4. Quiet alert: Wide open eyes that look around. Breastfeeding may work best when your baby is “quiet alert”
  5. Active alert: Eyes open, more body movement, fussing
  6. Crying: Awake and upset
- Watch your premie when he is just waking up (drowsy). When your baby is “quiet alert” and ready to breastfeed, he might:
  1. Smack his lips
  2. Stick out his tongue
  3. Put his hands up to his mouth

### **How will I know my baby is good at breastfeeding?**

- Lots of practice will help your premie learn how to breastfeed.
  1. He will start out sucking 1 or 2 times, then stop to rest.
  2. He may need to practice over many feeds to get strong and use a nice pattern to suck, swallow, and breathe.
  3. Babies love to practice!
- Good sucking means your baby can keep sucking for more than 10 seconds before pausing. Some premies may be home before they can suck well. Good sucking may not happen in the hospital.
- Look for:
  1. A wide-open mouth as big as a yawn. Baby’s mouth will take in all of your nipple and some of the darker colored areola.
  2. A good sucking rhythm with 1 suck per second.
  3. Baby swallows milk after every 1 or 2 sucks.
  4. Baby stays on the breast.
  5. Baby can suck and swallow several times in a row before he stops to rest.

### **How do I know my baby is drinking milk?**

- You may see milk at the corners of the baby’s mouth.
- You may hear him swallow.
- You can feel tugging when he sucks. The tug should feel like the breast pump.



### **How do I know that my baby is getting enough milk?**

- While your baby is in the hospital, you can weigh him before and after breastfeeding to see how much he drank.
- After your baby is 1 week old, look for:
  1. A gain of about 1/2 to 1 ounce (14 to 28 grams) every day at 34 to 36 weeks.
  2. Six or more wet diapers each day
  3. Three or more poopy diapers each day

### **How will I know if my baby is having a problem?**

Watch your baby when you breastfeed. If your baby shows any of these signs of stress, stop the feeding and give him a break.

- Breathing fast
- Hiccupping or coughing
- Gagging or choking
- Spreading his fingers
- Fussing
- Arching his back
- Looking away from you or staring into space
- If you think your baby is not getting enough to eat, ask your health care provider or lactation consultant.

### **Remember:**

- It is normal for your premie to sleep a lot.
- A quiet, dimly lit room and your gentle calm touch will help your baby wake up without over stimulation.
- When your baby wakes up, be ready to breastfeed. Do not make him wait.
- You and your baby will learn to breastfeed with lots of practice!

### **References**

1. Nyqvist K, Rubertsson CH, Ewald U. Development of the preterm infant breastfeeding behavior scale (PIBBS): a study of nurse-mother agreement. *J Hum Lact.* 1996;12:207-219.

### **Find Help Fast**

**A lactation consultant can help you learn about breastfeeding. Go to “Find a Lactation Consultant” at [www.ilca.org](http://www.ilca.org) to locate a lactation consultant in your area. You can also ask your doctor or a nurse at your hospital.**