

## **Premature and/or low birth weight**

Did you know?

If you leave the hospital before your baby, you can express milk for the hospital staff to give the baby by feeding tube.

Premature birth is when a baby is born before 37 weeks gestation. Prematurity often will mean that the baby is born at a low birth weight, defined as less than five and a half pounds. Low birth weight can also be caused by malnourishment in the mother. Arriving early or being small can make for a tough adjustment, especially if the baby has to stay in the hospital for extra care. But keep in mind that breast milk has been shown to help premature babies grow and ward off illness.

Most babies who are low birth weight but born after 37 weeks (full term) can begin breastfeeding right away. They will need more skin-to-skin contact with mom and dad to help keep them warm. These smaller babies may also need more frequent feedings, and they may get sleepier during those feedings.

Many babies born prematurely are often not able to breastfeed at first, but they do benefit from expressed milk. You can express colostrum by hand or pump as soon as you can in the hospital. You can talk to the hospital staff about renting a hospital grade electric pump. Call your insurance company or local WIC Office to find out if you can get reimbursed for this type of pump. You will need to express milk as often as you would have breastfed, so around 8 times per a 24-hour period.

Once your baby is ready to breastfeed directly, skin-to-skin contact can be very calming and a great start to your first feeding. Be sure to work with a lactation consultant on proper latch and positioning. Many mothers of premature babies find the cross cradle hold helpful. It may take some time for you and the baby to get into a good routine.