



Breastfeeding Coalition  
of Delaware

# Your “Early Arrival”

Some babies just can’t wait to be born! Rather than grow to full-term, they arrive 3 to 5 weeks early. Your “early arrival” may look full-term, but he isn’t. Mother’s milk is good for all babies, but it is even more important for babies born early. The tips below will help when nursing your “early arrival.”

**Doesn’t want to latch on:** Sure she does! She just needs time to learn. Be patient as it may take your baby more practice to open her mouth wide. Squeeze a drop of milk out, touch the baby’s mouth and let her lick it off. This will make her want more. Use positions that make latch easier. The “football” and “cross-cradle” hold work well as they provide good head support.

**Lazy suck:** Your baby may get tired while nursing. To prevent feeding fatigue, lightly support his lower jaw by cradling it in your hand as he nurses. Learn to hand-express or pump milk in case you need to give some pumped milk after you nurse or after a sleepy feeding. Expressing milk will also help you get a better start and assure that you will have lots of milk.

**Procrastinator:** Your baby may lose interest in nursing as soon as the flow of milk starts slowing down. Breast massage while nursing and switching to the other side when the baby loses interest will help. While the baby is nursing, you can also try grasping your breast with your thumb on one side and fingers on the other, taking a good amount of breast in your hand. Then gently squeeze your breast between your thumb and fingers. This “pushes” more milk out of the breast. Keep up the pressure until the baby loses interest again; then release the pressure. Rotate your hand and squeeze your breast once again. Once this no longer works, switch sides.

**Sleepy:** Late pre-term babies like to sleep a lot, even when they need to eat! Wake your baby to nurse if he sleeps longer than 3 hours between feeds.

**Too hot one minute! Too cold the next!** Give your baby lots of skin-to-skin snuggle time. It helps control her body temperature and helps increase milk production.

**Irregular breathing while nursing:** This is normal. He just needs to learn the rhythm of sucking, swallowing and breathing. Your baby may rest for a minute, slow their breathing and then start to suck again.

**Starts crying and won’t stop:** Your baby may have a hard time shutting down the cry cycle once she starts. Snuggle with her, rub her back or whisper in her ear. Once she calms, try to latch her on again. Respond to her feeding cues before she starts crying. Watch for early signs that she is ready to eat (hand in mouth, facial grimaces, eyelids move rapidly, wiggles and makes little sounds).

**Shuts down and won’t eat:** Babies born early can shut down quickly if over-stimulated. They may not like a lot of handling, noise or bright lights. Feed the baby in a dim and quiet room. Hold your baby skin-to-skin and rock him before the feeding for a few minutes. Try playing soft music during the feeding.

**Slow Gainer:** Some “early arrivals” gain weight a little more slowly because they don’t nurse as well as full term babies. Keeping track of the dirty diapers will tell you if your baby is nursing well. If she has less than 2 to 4 yellow, poopy diapers each day, pump milk after feedings. Give her some pumped milk after she nurses. It’s much better than giving formula.

*Your “early arrival” is just a few weeks behind. Baby will be nursing better in no time.*