



# Feeding your vulnerable baby

## Patient information

Some babies need increased observation and breastfeeding support after birth and are often referred to as “vulnerable babies”.

These may include babies:

- Babies born at less than 39 weeks
- With birth weight of less than 2500g
- Who are smaller or larger than expected for gestational age
- Born to a mother with a medical condition, eg: diabetes.

## Can I breastfeed?

Yes. Your breastmilk provides all the essential nutrition and immune protection your baby needs for healthy growth and development.

Your baby may look full term but:

- Lack the stamina, maturity and ability to breastfeed effectively
- Find it difficult to coordinate sucking with swallowing and breathing
- May look energetic but tire quickly or be too sleepy to breastfeed
- Be unable to show you when they are hungry.

## Learning to breastfeed

Breastfeeding takes time to learn and practise, especially for vulnerable babies. Support is available from your midwife or a lactation consultant.

A newborn baby will feed 8 to 12 times in 24 hours. You may need to wake your baby up to feed.

Support is available to help you attach your baby correctly to the breast.

Your baby may be deceptively vigorous at the breast, but tire quickly and lack the energy to effectively stimulate the breasts. This stimulation is important to build your breastmilk supply and meet your baby’s future needs.

You will be shown how to recognise signs of effective feeding.

If your baby is sleepy at the breast or tiring quickly, you will need to express after the breastfeed and feed your baby the expressed breastmilk.

## How do I express breastmilk?

Frequent removal of milk stimulates your breasts to build a supply of breastmilk and provide you with expressed breastmilk to supplement your baby.

Gentle hand expressing before using an electric breast pump may provide you with some colostrum to give to your baby in the early days.

A double hospital grade electric breast pump is recommended. It mimics the action of a healthy term baby, encouraging your body to build your supply of breastmilk.

Adjust the pump pressure to suit you; it should be comfortable and stimulate a letdown/flow of breastmilk. If it is too high and uncomfortable, it could cause nipple trauma. Flange size is also important.

Your midwife or lactation consultant will show you how to use the pump effectively and fit the correct size flange.

Until your baby is feeding effectively at the breast, it is important to express both breasts after each breastfeed to ensure the breasts are soft, comfortable and lump free.

There are various ways to feed your baby expressed breastmilk. Speak to your midwife or lactation consultant or scan the QR code below for more helpful information.

## Support and follow-up

Follow-up is important until your baby is gaining weight as expected (150-200g per week in the first 3 months), feeding effectively and your breastmilk supply is established.

The transition to exclusive breastfeeding may take several weeks. It is important to make use of the ongoing support we provide during this time.

For individual lactation support, contact the Breastfeeding Centre of WA on (08) 6458 1844, Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm, or visit the website.



Scan the QR code for resources on breastfeeding

You can also contact the Australian Breastfeeding Association Breastfeeding Helpline on 1800 686 268 or visit their website, [www.breastfeeding.asn.au](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au)

The information provided is for information purposes only. If you are a patient using this publication, you should seek assistance from a healthcare professional when interpreting these materials and applying them to your individual circumstances.



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