

Why Do I Need to Keep Pumping After my Premature Baby is Discharged from the NICU?

Mothers often think that pumping can end with NICU discharge because they are no longer separated from their premature babies.

However, premature babies may be too immature to drink enough milk only by feeding at the breast until they reach at least their expected birth date.

I have plenty of milk. Why do I need to pump?

Having enough milk when you pump does not mean that your premature baby drinks enough milk with breastfeeding. The pump removes milk more **effectively** (completely) and **efficiently** (quickly) than a typical premature baby at NICU discharge. So, your baby may not remove all of the milk you have worked so hard to build.

But I heard that the pump doesn't remove milk as well as a breastfeeding baby.

This may be true for a full-term baby with strong suction pressures, and a mother who is not used to breast pump use. **However, the opposite is true for a premature baby with weak suction pressures who falls asleep early in the feeding.** Until your baby breastfeeds like a full-term baby, you need to use the breast pump several times each day. Pumping helps keep plenty of milk available as your baby begins to feed more eagerly and regularly.

How does extra pumping help my baby drink more milk?

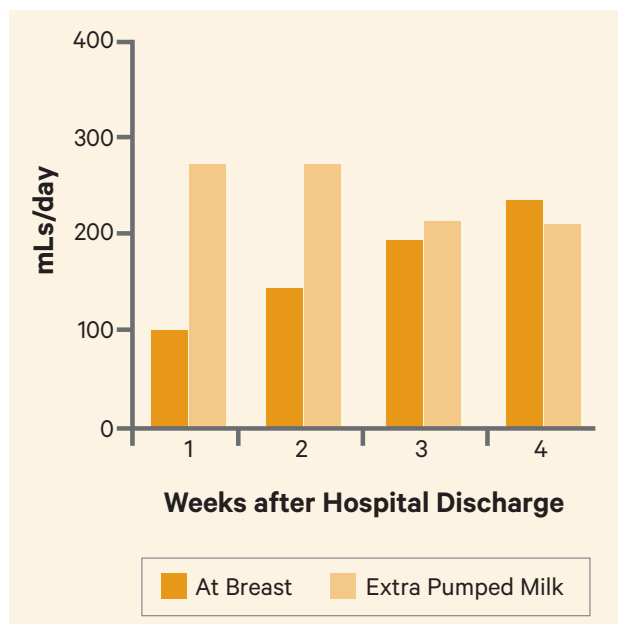
Since your premature baby may be unable to stimulate your breasts well enough to help you keep a good milk supply, the pump does this job. The graph is from research with premature babies who were discharged from the NICU at about 35.5 weeks of gestation. It shows the week-by-week progress with drinking milk from the breast.

- “At Breast” is the average amount of milk babies drank from the breast each day during the first 4 weeks at home.
- “Extra” is the amount of milk each day that the mothers in the study pumped and gave their babies by bottle.

- Over the first month at home, the babies gradually drank more milk from the breast than by bottle. However, most babies needed some extra pumped milk until about 2 weeks after the expected birth date.
- The babies were able to increase the amount of milk they drank from the breast because it was available and flowed quickly. The extra milk resulted from daily pumpings.
- If the mothers had not pumped, their milk supply would have decreased over the month because their babies were not emptying the breasts during feedings.

How long will I need to use the breast pump after my baby's NICU discharge?

Between NICU discharge and the expected birth date, premature babies typically have some daily breastfeedings when they are awake and feed eagerly. Over time, these effective, efficient breastfeedings become regular and babies gain weight well. Then, daily pumpings can gradually decrease. On average, mothers can stop pumping about 2 weeks after the expected birth date, but some can stop earlier, and others must pump for longer. Ask your baby's doctor or a lactation expert to help you make a plan for ending pumping that is specific for you and your baby.





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We look forward to your inquiry at: contact@lactahub.org