

# What are the Best Breastfeeding Positions for my Premature Baby?

Premature babies need different positions for breastfeeding than do full-term babies, both in the NICU and the early weeks at home. Once your baby stays awake for all breastfeedings and drinks plenty of milk, you can try positions for full-term babies.

## Why does my baby need a special position to breastfeed?

Premature babies need extra support for the head, shoulders and neck to get and keep a good latch on the breast. The head is large and heavy in relation to the still-developing muscles in the neck and shoulders. These weak muscles let the head tilt backward or to the side if it is not held in place with the mother's hand. Premature babies also have less suction strength to hold the nipple in the mouth, so if the head moves, the nipple slips out of the baby's mouth.

## How do I use my hand to support my baby's head and neck?

Picture 1 shows the right position. Use the palm of your hand to support your baby's head, your wrist to support the neck and shoulders, and your arm to support your baby's back. Your fingers make a circle around the back of your baby's head. Your other hand supports the breast. Use your hand and arm to bring your baby to your breast instead of bending and trying to put the nipple in his or her mouth.

## What are the special positions?

These positions have names such as the cross-cradle (Picture 2) and football (Picture 3) holds. You will work with your baby's nurse or lactation expert to find a position that is best for you and your baby. Sometimes babies prefer to lie on one side rather than the other. Depending upon the size of your breasts, you may be able to see your baby better in the football than the cross-cradle hold. Use pillows and blanket rolls to relax your back, shoulders and arms.



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



## Disclaimer

This general information sheet is intended for use under the guidance of health professionals in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). It is primarily for training purposes and for additional information to be given to parents or private persons without medical education by NICU health professionals. The general information sheets provided by Rush University Medical Center are for parents and interested private persons without medical education and we do not raise any claim to completeness of the information sheets. Under no circumstances should this information be regarded as a substitute for professional advice or treatment or for any independent medical judgment of a healthcare professional regarding specific patient diagnoses or treatment plans. Healthcare providers should exercise their own independent medical judgment, and decisions as to any diagnosis or treatment plan are the sole responsibility of such healthcare provider. The general content of this information sheet cannot and shall not be used to make independent diagnoses or begin treatment. Our information is not personally related to you. We therefore recommend that you visit recognised healthcare professionals to get specific advice for any medical problems.

This information sheet was published on [www.LactaHub.org](http://www.LactaHub.org) on 4 August 2020. It is provided in good faith. We will be happy to provide you with further information and guidance.

We look forward to your inquiry at: [contact@lactahub.org](mailto:contact@lactahub.org)