

Special Needs

OF MY “LATE-PRETERM” BABY

Your baby was born early and may be at a high risk for certain health problems compared to full-term newborns. Some babies born between 34 and 36 completed weeks of pregnancy seem healthy at first and may be significantly larger than very premature infants. However, they can have breathing problems, jaundice, feeding difficulties, low blood sugar, unstable body temperatures, or other medical conditions.

- A “Late-Preterm” baby is an infant born between 34 and 36 completed weeks of pregnancy.
- You’re not alone! Most babies born prematurely are considered to be “Late-Preterm.”

“Late-preterm” babies account for most babies born prematurely! In 2008, there were 372,161 late-preterm births in the United States, representing 8.8% of live births.

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, final natality data.

The lungs and the brain are the last organs to fully mature when a baby is inside the mother’s womb. Because your infant was born before these last important weeks, it is important for you to be extra aware of his or her possible related needs. The good news is that the more you learn, the better you can help keep your late-preterm baby healthy.



Helping Parents



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Some things that you, as a parent of a late-preterm baby, should know:

FEEDING

Whether you are breast-feeding or bottle feeding, your infant may tend to feed slower than a full-term baby and may not be able to take in as much nourishment at each feeding. To adjust to this, you may want to feed your baby often—especially for the first several weeks. If your infant begins to refuse feedings, even for less than a day, you should contact a healthcare practitioner.

BREATHING

Even at this late stage in a nine-month pregnancy, a baby's lungs may not be able to work properly on their own. If your baby shows any signs of struggling for breath, or any trouble breathing at all, get medical help, or call 911.

SLEEPING

It is possible that your baby will be sleepier than most full-term infants and may sleep through feedings. Contact your baby's healthcare provider to see if you should be waking your baby for feedings every three to four hours. As always, all babies should be put to sleep on their backs.

TEMPERATURE

Your baby may have less body fat than full-term infants and may have difficulty keeping his or her body temperature constant. All newborns should be kept away from drafts and you may want to dress your baby in one more layer than you are wearing.

INFECTIONS

Because many late-preterm infants have underdeveloped immune systems to fight infection, you should watch your infant for any signs of illness, such as:

- fever
- breathing problems
- changes in skin color
- changes in behavior
- changes in feeding pattern

To help fight infection, you may also choose to avoid taking your baby to crowded places, such as: the mall, supermarket, or large family gatherings, and limit visitors to your home who may be ill. Always ask anyone who will be touching or holding your baby to wash their hands before doing so.

IMMUNIZATIONS AND FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENTS

All babies should be seen by their healthcare provider within 24 to 48 hours after leaving the hospital and should return for medical follow-up and immunizations as recommended. It is important to note that there are certain vaccines available to help prevent some infections. Speak to your healthcare provider about what is right for your baby.

This information is for educational purposes only and is not intended to substitute for professional medical advice. Always consult with a healthcare professional if you have any questions about the health of your child.

