

Together From the Start

Connection, breastmilk and breastfeeding for premature and ill babies

Your baby may have arrived earlier than expected or need extra care. Your love, your voice and your presence still matter most.

Small babies. Big love.
A brighter tomorrow. 



It's normal to feel...

- Scared
- Overwhelmed
- Sad or anxious
- Like you're living in a fog
- As if you've handed over care to strangers

These feelings are a normal part of having a baby who is born early or needs extra care. Be gentle with yourself as you adjust.

 You are not alone.



For your baby, you matter most



Talk to your baby.

They know your voice and the voices of their close family. Hearing your voice helps them feel calm and safe.



Be close.

Your presence, touch and skin-to-skin care can help stabilize your baby, support their development and can release a hormone called **oxytocin**.



Your love helps your baby grow and thrive.



Your breastmilk is a powerful gift



Provides the best nutrition for your baby's growth and development.



Contains antibodies to help protect them from infection in hospital and for years to come.



Is especially important for premature and ill babies.



Your baby may receive small amounts of your milk soon after birth, even if they are not yet ready to feed fully.



The earlier you start expressing your milk, the more you will produce for your baby's needs.

Every drop of your milk helps to protect and nourish your baby. 



Offering the breast and direct breastfeeding



When your baby is stable, offering the breast as soon as possible helps them learn and practise breastfeeding skills.



Babies do not need to trial bottle feeding before breastfeeding.



Feeding at the breast, with support, can help your baby develop the skills they need, even if they also receive milk by tube at first.



Your healthcare team can help you find the best position and develop a feeding plan for you and your baby.



You are part of the care team

The neonatal team has special skills and equipment to care for your baby, but you are a key member of the team. Your knowledge, involvement and milk are important. Together, we can give your baby the best possible start.



Your baby.
Your love.
Their future.



Other ways you can help



Spend time in skin-to-skin care when possible.



Talk, read and sing to your baby.



Provide your breastmilk or donor milk as recommended.



Be involved in your baby's care (e.g. diaper changes, comforting, reading or gentle containment).



Ask questions and share your hopes and concerns.



Take care of yourself so you can be there for your baby.



Informed parents. Brighter tomorrows. 

Learn more about breastfeeding, bonding and family support in **A Gift for You and Me!**

[Michelleledrew.ca/babygift](https://michelleledrew.ca/babygift)

 **A Gift for You and Me!**

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References:

1. World Health Organization and UNICEF. Protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding: the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative for small, sick and preterm newborns. 2020.
2. UNICEF UK. You and your baby: Supporting love and nurture on the neonatal unit. <https://www.unicef.org.uk>