UNDERSTANDING Nutrition in the NICU



Babies need the right nutrition to grow and develop. In the NICU, there are several different ways to feed a baby. How your baby is fed depends on his/her age, weight, and medical condition. There are two main ways of feeding: **enteral** and **parenteral**. Talk to your health care team about which way is right for your baby

Enteral Nutrition

Feeding by mouth

Some babies in the NICU are ready to eat by mouth as soon as they are born. These babies may be fed breast milk or formula. In either case, babies in the NICU often need extra supplements to get the calories, vitamins, and minerals they need.

Feeding by tube

Babies with working **digestive systems** who are unable to feed by mouth may need to be fed by tube. The tube carries breast milk or formula directly into the baby's stomach. There are two main types of feeding tubes:

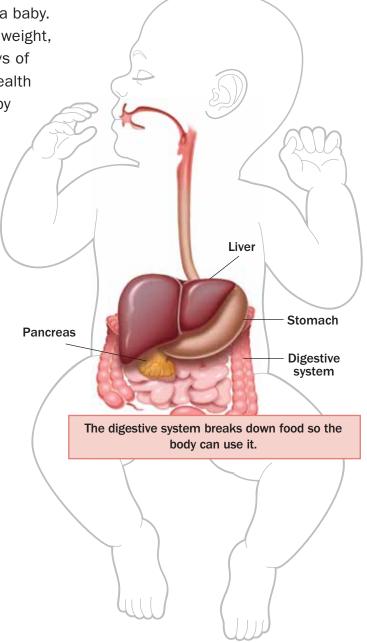
- Tubes that go through the baby's mouth (orogastric or OG tubes)
- Tubes that go through the baby's nose (nasogastric or NG tubes)

When is tube feeding used?

Tube feeding is most often used in premature babies. The ability to coordinate sucking, swallowing, and breathing doesn't usually develop until 34 to 36 weeks' gestational age. Tube feeding is also used for babies with medical problems that make feeding by mouth difficult.

How long will my baby be fed by tube?

If the baby is premature, tube feeding will be used until the baby is capable of eating by mouth. If the baby has a medical problem, tube feeding will be used as long as needed.



Understanding Nutrition in the NICU (continued)

Total Parenteral Nutrition (TPN)

What is TPN?

With TPN, the baby receives nutrition through a vein (**intravenously**). TPN uses a special fluid that is similar to breast milk and formula. It contains the carbohydrates (sugar), protein, fat, vitamins, and minerals that your baby needs in a form that can be given intravenously.

When is TPN Used?

TPN is usually used when the baby's digestive system is immature or doesn't work properly or when the baby has had certain types of surgery.

How long will my baby be fed with TPN?

TPN may be needed for a few days or for several months. It depends on the baby and the baby's health. For most babies, the goal is to move to enteral feeding when possible.

What will happen next?

Your NICU team will include at least one nutritionist or dietician. That person will help decide which type of feeding is right for your baby. Talk to your health care team if you have any questions about your baby's nutrition.

Glossary

Digestive system – group of organs that processes food. It includes the mouth, stomach, liver, pancreas, and intestines

Enteral – through the digestive system

Intravenous – through a vein

Nasogastric – from the nose to the digestive system

Orogastric – from the mouth to the digestive system

Parenteral – *not* through the digestive system

Ask the health care team when you have questions—they are there to help.

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