Congratulations on the birth of your baby!

Your baby was born a few weeks before she was due—between 34 and 37 weeks of pregnancy. In the hospital she’s called a near-term baby. Even though she’s strong enough to go home now, she still needs extra help to finish the growth she might have had inside you. This booklet will help you know what you can do to help her.

PROTECT YOUR BABY FROM GERMS

All newborns are vulnerable to germs. To protect your near-term baby, follow these guidelines:

- **Make everyone wash their hands** before they come near your baby. This simple step can do a lot to keep your baby healthy.

- **If someone is ill—even if it’s just a cold—don’t allow them near your baby.** Say, “I’m sorry, but our doctor told us to be extra careful. Get well soon, so you can come and see her!”

- **If you are ill, wash your hands even more often.** But continue to breastfeed! Breast milk is your baby’s best protection against illness.
Watch out for jaundice

Jaundice is too much bilirubin in the bloodstream. It makes skin look yellow, and can make your baby extra sleepy. It usually goes away on its own, but if it’s severe it can cause other problems. Since your near-term baby may have more jaundice than a full-term baby, do the following things at home:

- **Feed him 6 to 8 times** in the first 24 hours, and 8 to 12 times a day thereafter. See the tips at the right side of this page.

- **Keep track of his messy diapers.** He should have at least one messy diaper every day until he’s four days old. Then he should have four messy diapers a day. Having four messy diapers tells you that he’s getting enough milk to get rid of the jaundice and begin to gain weight.

FEED YOUR BABY OFTEN

Your near-term baby needs to eat often—at least 8 times in a 24-hour period (every 2 1/2 hours during the day, or every 4 hours at night). A good rule of thumb is that if he’s awake, he should be eating.

But what if he doesn’t wake up? Or what if he gets distracted, or falls asleep too fast? Here are some tips to find or create the right moment to feed your baby:

- **Have him sleep in your room with you** so you can see his feeding cues more quickly. What are his cues? Each baby is different, but watch for him to:
  - Bring his hands to his mouth
  - Move his mouth and tongue
  - Move around quietly

- **Gently help him wake up:**
  - Sing to him or call his name.
  - Change his whole body position slowly. Roll him slowly side-to-side on a pillow on your lap. Sit him up and down a few times.
  - Change his diaper, undress him, and put him next to you near your breast. Have him in the right position as you start feeding so you don’t have to move him around while he’s eating.
  - Try to be patient if he’s slow to wake up. Wait for him to open his mouth at the touch of your breast or the bottle. This is better than pushing and pulling his jaw down. (Some infants need to have special mouth stimulation. The lactation educators can help you with this.)

- **Keep things calm and quiet when you feed him.** You may need to turn off the TV and bright lights. Ask visitors to leave and ask children to sit quietly. You want your baby awake—but not distracted!

SAVE THE PACIFIER

If you’re breastfeeding, don’t give your baby a pacifier during the first month of life. This allows breastfeeding to become well established. After that, pacifier use may help prevent sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
MAKE SURE YOUR BABY GETS ENOUGH MILK

If you’re breastfeeding, you can’t see how much milk your baby is drinking each time. To help make sure your baby is getting enough, try the tips below:

MAKE THE MOST OF EACH BREASTFEEDING SESSION

Because she was born a little early, she may not have a strong enough suck to get the milk she needs. You can help her when you:

■ Hold your breast, keeping your fingers behind the areola in a C-hold, to help keep your nipple in her mouth

■ Compress and massage your breast while the baby is feeding to help her get more milk in a shorter time

■ Supplement with stored breast milk or formula

PUMP AND STORE YOUR MILK TO INCREASE YOUR SUPPLY

Pumping will help bring in a good supply of milk so your baby won’t have to work so hard. Start this extra pumping right away, even if your milk isn’t in yet. Some mothers can squeeze milk out of their breasts by hand (hand express). Most find that a hospital-grade double electric breast pump is faster. Here are a few guidelines:

■ After breastfeeding, pump or hand-express your milk into a bottle for at least 10 minutes.

■ Give your baby the pumped breast milk as a supplement after breast-feeding. Refrigerate or freeze what she doesn’t drink for later use.

■ Keep pumping and supplementing until your baby is past her due date and is gaining 4-8 ounces a week. At this point, you can gradually reduce the amount you give her as a supplement to breastfeeding.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PUMPING:

■ Wash your hands before pumping.

■ Pump until your flow of milk slows or stops—about 10-20 minutes if you’re using a double-electric pump. You’ll need to pump longer if you’re using a small pump or a hand pump.

■ After each use, wash the pieces of the pump kit that touch your breast or the milk with hot, soapy water. Follow the pump manufacturer’s instructions.

If you’re formula feeding, feed your baby at least 8 times a day, about 2 ounces each time—between 14 and 18 ounces in a 24-hour period. Your doctor may also recommend a high-calorie formula to help your baby gain weight.

Whether you’re feeding breast milk, formula, or both, you’ll know your baby’s getting enough to eat if she gains about an ounce a day and eats more as she grows.
KEEP YOUR BABY WARM

Near-term babies often have trouble staying warm. Their bodies may have to work extra hard to warm themselves—which means there’s less energy for eating and growing. Luckily, you can do a lot to help your baby stay warm. Below are some ideas.

Snuggle your baby skin to skin (kangaroo care)

One of the very best ways to keep your baby warm is to hold him close to you. Skin-to-skin contact—sometimes called “kangaroo care”—is especially good. Not only does it keep your baby warm, but it also helps him relax and improves his heart rate and breathing. It’s a great way to get your baby to eat, too. Mom and Dad can both do it! Here’s what to do:

- **Undress your baby** down to his diaper.
- **Remove your own clothing** above the waist. If you’re wearing a bra, take that off, too.
- **Put a blanket over both of you** to keep warm. When your baby is not skin-to-skin, wrap him in a blanket and put a hat on him.

Help your baby curl up

Most babies like to stay curled up in a fetal position. But your near-term baby may not be strong enough to hold a nice, tight position. If you help him, he’ll stay warmer and use less energy. Try the following tips:

- **When breastfeeding:** Hold your baby in a cross-cradle or football-hold position. Place his hands on either side of your breast so they’re close to his face.
- **When holding:** Cradle him closely in your arms and tuck his legs in close to his body.
- **When carrying:** Carry your baby snuggled close your body in your arms, or curled up in a baby carrier. If using a sling-style baby carrier, check your baby often to make sure he’s breathing properly.

Call your baby’s doctor
(or lactation consultant) if your baby is:

- Eating fewer than 8 times in 24 hours
- Having fewer than 6 wet diapers in 24 hours
- By day 4, having fewer than 4 yellow stools in 24 hours
- Becoming increasingly yellow (jaundiced), especially below the belly button, on the soles of the feet, or in the whites of the eyes
- Gaining fewer than 8 ounces per week