

“Dry” Breastfeeding

(Sucking At The Emptied Breast) For Preterm Infants

Research has shown that even very premature infants know how to suck, and that sucking on a pacifier (often called “non-nutritive” sucking) may improve breathing patterns and weight gain. However, many premature infants have not learned how to coordinate sucking, swallowing and breathing yet and may “drown” when trying to breastfeed from a full breast. If you empty as much milk as possible from your breast by pumping before you put your baby to breast, your infant can suckle “non-nutritively” from your breast.

With “dry” breastfeeding your baby does not actually drink significant amounts of milk, but he is able to smell and taste the droplets of milk that remain in your breast after pumping. The milk that you pumped just before you put your baby to breast can be fed to him with a feeding tube so that he associates you and breastfeeding with a full tummy.

“Dry breastfeeding” before an infant is mature enough to be fed at a full breast has been associated with improved milk supply for mothers and longer breastfeeding after discharge home. It enables you to practice holding and latching-on your infant without worrying how much milk he is getting. It also helps your baby learn how to latch-on and suckle without straining to breathe between sucks. Dry breastfeeding is a natural extension of Kangaroo Care.

