



SMART PARENTING *for* CHILD

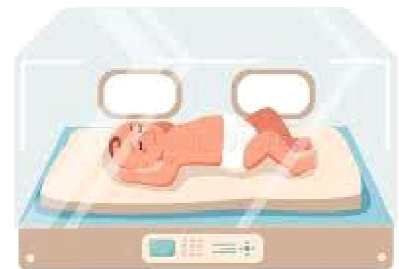
Dr. Godbole's Chiranjeev Child Development Center

Parenting a Premature baby

Premature infants, known as preemies, come into the world earlier than full-term infants. Prematurity occurs when a pregnancy lasts less than 37 weeks; full-term infants are born during 37 to 42 weeks. Often, the cause of preterm delivery is unknown and not within the mother's control.

However, sometimes it's caused by the mother's health conditions or lifestyle choices during pregnancy, such as having diabetes mellitus, hypertension, heart or kidney problems, an infection particularly of urinary tract / amniotic membranes, poor nutrition during pregnancy, or bleeding due to abnormal positioning of the placenta.

Also, preterm delivery can happen due to structural abnormality or overstretching of the uterus by carrying more than one fetus (twins, triplets, or more) or using tobacco, alcohol, or illicit drugs during pregnancy. Preterm deliveries occur with greater frequency among women younger than 19 or older than 40, and among those with a previous preterm delivery. However, any woman may have a premature baby, caused by unknown factors.



Special Needs

Preemies have many special needs that make their care different from that of full-term infants, which is why they often begin their lives after delivery in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). The NICU is designed to provide an atmosphere that limits stress to the infant and meets basic needs of warmth, nutrition, and protection to assure proper growth and development. Due to many recent advances, more than 90% of premature babies who weigh 800 grams or more survive. Those who weigh more than 500 grams (a little more than 1 pound) have a more than 60% chance of survival, although their chances of complications are greater.

A Premie's Basic Needs Warmth

Premature babies lack the body fat necessary to maintain their body temperature, even when swaddled with blankets. So incubators or radiant warmers are used to keep them warm in the NICU. Keeping babies' temperatures within a normal range will help them grow faster. Incubators are made of transparent plastic,

and completely surround babies to keep them warm, decrease the chance of infection, and limit water loss. Radiant warmers are electrically warmed beds open to the air. These are used when the medical staff needs frequent access to the baby for care. A tiny thermometer taped to the baby's skin senses his/her body temperature and regulates the heat.

Nutrition and Growth

Premature babies have special nutritional needs because they grow at a faster rate than full-term babies and their digestive systems are immature. Neonatologists (pediatricians who specialize in the care of sick full-term and preterm infants) measure their weight in grams, not pounds and ounces. Full-term babies usually weigh more than 2,500 grams (about 5 pounds, 8 ounces), whereas premature babies weigh anywhere from about 500 to 2,500 grams.

What are premature babies fed?

Breast milk is an excellent source of nutrition, but premature infants are too immature to feed directly from the breast or bottle until they're 32 to 34 weeks gestational age. Most premature infants have to be fed slowly because of the risk of developing necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), an intestinal infection unique to preemies. Breast milk can be pumped by the mother and fed to the premature baby through a tube that goes from the baby's nose or mouth into the stomach. Breast milk has an advantage over formula because it contains proteins that help fight infection and promote growth. Special fortifiers may be added to breast milk (or to formula if breastfeeding isn't desired), because premature infants have higher vitamin and mineral needs than full-term infants. Nearly all premature babies receive additional calcium and phosphorus either by adding fortifier to breast milk or directly through special formulas for preemies. The baby's blood chemicals and minerals, such as blood glucose (sugar), salt, potassium, calcium, phosphate, and magnesium, are monitored regularly, and the baby's diet is adjusted to keep these substances within a normal range.