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Breastfeeding the Late Preterm Infant: Improving Care and Outcomes

Marsha Walker, RN, IBCLC

Hale Publishing, 2009

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Each year in the United States, 350,000 late preterm infants are born. This group of newborns is two to four times more likely to experience complications of respiratory distress, NICU admissions, sepsis, or hospitalization for more than 5 days. Assisting the mother of the late preterm baby with breastfeeding can be fraught with challenges and can be very time consuming.

In **Breastfeeding the Late Preterm Infant**, Marsha Walker shares practical information and pragmatic suggestions that can aid the breastfeeding educator. She explains why the number of early births is on the rise, followed by an excellent overview of human newborn suck physiology. She goes on to explain the less competent suck coordination in late preterm babies, thus allowing a thorough understanding of the possible negative impact on the success of initial breastfeeding.

Under *Breastfeeding Management Guidelines*, Walker delineates the importance of kangaroo care, coupled with correct positioning, emphasizing that the mother keep her hand off the back of the newborn's head. She further outlines how correct positioning assists gravity in milk transfer for the baby with a weak suck.

If optimizing position and latch of the infant at the breast does not sufficiently increase milk transfer for optimal growth, Additional options are presented, such as when to supplement, how to use bottles and artificial nipples, and ways to optimize milk production. A sample of an individualized feeding/pumping plan for when the baby leaves the hospital is provided. Walker discusses the use of a nipple shield for preterm babies as it assists the baby in transferring more milk. Some readers may disagree with the suggestion “of picking the size to fit the infant's mouth” (p.33) versus sized to fit the mother's nipple.

There are many helpful pictures and graphs in this easy-to-read, well referenced, monograph. **Breastfeeding the Late Preterm Infant** gives a tight, crisp summary of the developmental difficulties of late preterm infants. It provides cogent suggestions on how the breastfeeding educator can address these difficulties in a manner that will, hopefully, have the infant solely breastfeeding within a few weeks.

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