

NCCU CLINICAL GUIDELINES
SECTION: 7
BREAST FEEDING

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Use of nipple shields
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USE OF NIPPLE SHIELDS FOR PRETERM INFANTS

Until recently it was believed that nipple shields contributed to a reduction in milk transfer and possibly a reduction in supply. Recent research however has shown that the use of nipple shields for preterm or small infants who are unable to maintain attachment, can reduce infant fatigue and increase milk transfer and duration of breastfeeding.

Not all mothers of preterm infants will benefit from the use of a nipple shield. If the use of a nipple shield is being considered, refer to the Lactation Consultant / Midwife and discuss the problem prior to implementation. The mother's milk supply and corrected gestational age of the infant needs to be considered.

RECOMMENDED USE

Nipple shields can facilitate attachment of the infant to the breast in:

- Preterm infants who are unable to sustain correct attachment at the breast (constantly slip off the breast)
- Preterm infants who fall asleep as soon as they are attached and are unable to maintain regular nutritive sucking.
- Flat or inverted nipples with repeated failure to achieve attachment with an alert infant.

KEY POINTS

1. Ensure mother has an adequate milk supply.
2. Ensure mother is aware of, and agrees to the use of a nipple shield.
3. Choose appropriate size shield for the infant's mouth.

SIZING GUIDE
Small: < 2kg
Medium: 2 – 3 kg
Large: > 3 kg

4. To fit shield, ask the mother to express a few drops of milk into the shield and around the areola. The shield should be applied centrally over the nipple, the cut out area being placed where the infant's nose will be positioned. Stretch the shield to allow the nipple to be drawn in.
5. The nipple shield should be washed in hot soapy water, rinsed and dried after each use and stored in a clean container under the infant's cot.
6. Document indication for use and its effectiveness in the infant's notes, review daily the need to continue.

If nipple shields are used at discharge ensure appropriate follow-up is arranged eg. NCCU Home Visiting Nurse (for follow-up program / special needs babies), KEMH Breastfeeding Centre, Child Health Nurse. Preterm infants will require the nipple shield until they are able to maintain attachment for adequate milk transfer for the whole feed. This may be until approximately term corrected age or longer.

Also see [8.3.2 Use of Nipple Shields. O&G Clinical Guidelines](#)

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

- J. Riordan, K. Wambach. Breastfeeding and Human Lactation 4th Edition 2009
- R. Mannel, P.J. Martens, M. Walker (Eds). Core Curriculum for Lactation Consultant Practice. 3rd Edition 2012
- W. Brodribb (Ed). Breastfeeding Management, 4th Edition 2012.
- R. Lawrence, R. Lawrence. Breastfeeding: A Guide for the Medical Profession 7th Edition, 2010