

Babies need the right nutrition to grow and develop. In the NICU, there are several different ways to feed a baby. How your baby is fed depends on his/her age, weight, and medical condition. There are two main ways of feeding: **enteral** and **parenteral**. Talk to your health care team about which way is right for your baby

Enteral Nutrition

Feeding by mouth

Some babies in the NICU are ready to eat by mouth as soon as they are born. These babies may be fed breast milk or formula. In either case, babies in the NICU often need extra supplements to get the calories, vitamins, and minerals they need.

Feeding by tube

Babies with working **digestive systems** who are unable to feed by mouth may need to be fed by tube. The tube carries breast milk or formula directly into the baby's stomach. There are two main types of feeding tubes:

- Tubes that go through the baby's mouth (**orogastric** or OG tubes)
- Tubes that go through the baby's nose (**nasogastric** or NG tubes)

When is tube feeding used?

Tube feeding is most often used in premature babies. The ability to coordinate sucking, swallowing, and breathing doesn't usually develop until 34 to 36 weeks' gestational age. Tube feeding is also used for babies with medical problems that make feeding by mouth difficult.

How long will my baby be fed by tube?

If the baby is premature, tube feeding will be used until the baby is capable of eating by mouth. If the baby has a medical problem, tube feeding will be used as long as needed.



