Purpose: To provide a protocol for feeding of high-risk and premature neonates.

Target Client Population: This guideline applies to the NICU population including premature infants < 34 weeks GA at birth and term infants with congenital anomalies that prevent establishment of full enteral nutrition at birth.

Background

Premature infants, especially very low birth weight (VLBW) and extremely low birth weight (ELBW) infants are at high risk of post natal growth delay because of unmet high caloric needs.

Pulmonary and hemodynamic instability in the first few days of life and the immaturity of the gastrointestinal tract may delay the initiation and/or advancement of enteral nutrition after birth. Hence the majority of preterm infants will require parenteral nutrition (TPN) from the first day of life until enteral nutrition is initiated and advanced to full feeding volume goal.

Optimal nutritional management rom birth decreases postnatal catabolism, promotes growth and improves neurodevelopmental outcome.

Treatment Criteria

Clinical evidence supports the use of feedings in the following situations:

- Initiation of TPN within 24 hours to decrease catabolism and prevent hyperglycemia and suboptimal postnatal growth.
- The use of trophic feeding with mother’s own milk or preterm formula to prevent villous atrophy, and to facilitate feeding tolerance and faster attainment of full feeding and better growth.
- Use of mother’s own milk is the preferred food substrate for neonates for its immunologic properties and better tolerance by the immature GI tract and for its association with a lower risk of necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) compared to formula feeding.
- Once clinically feasible (cardiovascular stability), trophic (10-20 ml/kg/d) feedings within 24-48 hours stimulate gut hormones and prime the gut for tolerating regular feeds.
- Increasing enteral feeding volumes to 20-30 ml/kg/day, following GI priming and tolerance of trophic feedings.
- Nipple feeding and lactation (direct breast feeding, or bottle feeding of expressed breast milk or preterm formula) should be encouraged as tolerated based on demonstrated oral cues and feeding readiness scores and not gestational age.
- That the optimal approach to a preterm infant’s oral feeding journey should be based on their maturing behavioral cues rather than just their gestational age.
- Coordination of suck-swallow-breathing is a crucial prerequisite for successful oral feeding.
Treatment Criteria
(continued)

- It is crucial for NICUs to have evidence based guidelines for initiation and halting feedings, evaluation and scoring of feeding intolerance, suspected NEC and other feeding setbacks, including re-feeding plans following resolution of NEC.
- Use of feeding readiness regimens versus every two hour feeding, every three hour feeding or every four hour infant feeding regimens.
- Early referral to Speech Therapy/Occupations Therapy/Physical Therapy for evaluation of suck and swallow and intervention especially in babies with significant oral aversion.
- Use of the following strategies when oral feeding is not progressing: different infant positioning, trial of thickening via rice cereal or pre-thickened formula, and use of low flow nipples.
- The routine use of proton pump inhibitors and antacids for gastroesophageal reflux is not recommended for lack of evidence for efficacy in the neonate. Additionally, antacids have been associated with increased risk for sepsis.

Clinical Evidence

- A randomized controlled trial by Vlaardingerbroek, et al, (2013), was done to assess the efficacy and safety of early parenteral lipid and high dose amino acid administration from birth onwards in very low birth weight infants. The authors concluded that the administration of parenteral amino acids combined with lipids improved conditions for anabolism and growth as shown by an improved nitrogen balance.

- Adamkin, (2013), reviewed the literature regarding early parenteral lipid and amino acid administration in very low birth weight infants. He noted that early nutritional support provided to extremely low birth weight (ELBW) infants acted as a mediator between critical illness the first weeks of life and later growth and outcomes which include bronchopulmonary dysplasia (BPD), late onset sepsis, hospital stays, neurodevelopmental impairment, cognition and death. He also noted that the administration of intravenous amino acids had decreased the glucose concentrations in ELBW infants, presumably by enhancing endogenous insulin secretion.

- Ben, (2008), reviewed the literature regarding nutritional management of newborn infants. He noted that trophic feedings during parenteral nutrition (PN) are a strategy to enhance the feeding tolerance and decrease the side effects of PN and the time to achieve full feeding. Human milk is a key component of any strategy for enteral nutrition of all infants. However, the amounts of calcium, phosphorus, zinc and other nutrients are inadequate to meet the needs of the very low birth weight (VLBW) infants during growth. Therefore, safe and effective means to fortify human milk are essential to the care of VLBW infants.

- In 2009, Terrin, et al, performed a randomized retrospective study of 102 infants who presented with feed intolerance. In this study, 51 neonates were given parenteral nutrition only and 51 were given parenteral nutrition plus minimal enteral feedings. The authors found that the neonates who were given the parenteral nutrition plus the minimal enteral feedings achieved full enteral nutrition earlier, had a reduction of sepsis episodes and regained their birth weight and were discharged earlier. The authors concluded that minimal enteral feeding in very low birth weight infants presenting feed intolerance reduces the time to reach full enteral feeding and the risk of sepsis.

- A randomized study by Meetze et al (1992), found that infants who received GI priming plus TPN had improved feeding tolerance after day 20, had a faster rise in serum gastrin and did not have an increase in the risk of feeding complications compared to TPN alone.
Clinical Evidence (continued)

• A randomized prospective study by Ostertag, et al (1986), found that initiating enteral feedings on day one did not adversely affect the incidence of necrotizing enterocolitis.

• A randomized study by Slagle, et al (1988), showed that infants who had received low volume enteral feeds in addition to parenteral alimentation for 10 days achieved a faster feeding tolerance than infants who only received parenteral during that same period. The authors concluded that the initiation of enteral substrate as an adjunct to parenteral nutrition improved subsequent feeding tolerance in sick infants with very low birth weights.

• A randomized study by Weiler, et al (2006), found that while the use of minimal enteral feeding enhanced bone mineral content of the spine and femur over the use of parenteral amino acids, it did not improve the overall growth of the infant.

• In 2012 the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) reaffirmed its position statement that human milk is the normative standard for infant feeding and nutrition and should be done exclusively for six months followed by continued breastfeeding as complementary foods are introduced. It also stated that breastfeeding is associated with a 64% reduction in the incidence of nonspecific gastrointestinal tract infections and a 77% reduction in NEC.

• A multicenter randomized controlled trial by Cristofalo, et al (2013), found that there was a significantly greater duration of parenteral nutrition and higher rate of surgical necrotizing enterocolitis in infants receiving preterm formula then in infants receiving human milk.

• In 2013, Underwood reviewed the literature and provided the following points regarding the use of human milk as the optimal nutrition for preterm infants. The use of fortified mother’s own milk is the optimal diet for the premature infant to maximize growth, development and protection against necrotizing enterocolitis and infection. Fortified pasteurized human donor milk is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics Section on Breastfeeding as the preferred alternative for premature infants whose mothers are unable to provide a sufficient volume of their own milk. Pasteurized donor human milk does not provide the same nutrient or biologically active molecules as unpasteurized own mother’s milk. Careful attention to establishing and maintaining milk production in women delivering preterm has significant benefits. The author concluded that fortified human milk has tremendous benefits in improving the growth and short and long-term outcomes for the premature infant.

• In 2009, Meinzen-Derr, et al, reviewed a multicenter, randomized, double-masked trial performed by the National Institute of Health on glutamine supplementation, to determine whether increasing human milk intake was associated with a decreased risk of NEC or death. The authors concluded that the study findings were consistent with other observational studies that reported on varying doses of human milk in relation to a reduced risk of NEC.

• In 2007, Sisk, et al, performed a prospective cohort study of very low birth weight infants to analyze the association between human milk and necrotizing enterocolitis. The authors concluded that enteral feedings containing at least 50% of human milk in the first 14 days of life was associated with a six fold decrease in the odds of NEC.
• In 2012, Leaf, et al, performed a multicenter randomized controlled trial of growth restricted preterm infants to see if early introduction of enteral feeds increased the risk of developing necrotizing enterocolitis. The study found that full feeds were achieved at an earlier age in the early group with 18% of those infants having an episode of all stage NEC versus 15% in the late group. The incidence of stages 2 and 3 NEC, which is of greater clinical importance was 8% in both groups. In addition, the early group had less cholestatic jaundice then the latter group, with a shorter duration of parenteral nutrition and high dependency care. There was no difference in overall length of stay or duration of intensive care. The authors concluded that there was no evidence of benefit in delaying the introduction of small volumes of enteral feeds in preterm, intrauterine growth restricted infants beyond 24 to 48 hours.

• In 2013, Morgan, et al, reviewed the literature to determine the effect of slow rates of enteral feed advancement on the incidence of necrotizing enterocolitis, mortality and other morbidities in very preterm or very low birth weight (VLBW) infants. They found five randomized controlled trials which defined slow advancement as daily increments of 15 to 20 mL/kg and faster advancement of 30 to 35 mL/kg. Meta-analysis did not detect statistically significant effects on the risk of necrotizing enterocolitis, or all-cause mortality. The authors concluded that advancing enteral feed volumes at slow rather than faster rates does not reduce the risk of necrotizing enterocolitis in very preterm or VLBW infants but did result in a several day in regaining birth weight and establishing full enteral feeds.

• In 2013, Karagol, et al, performed a randomized controlled trial to evaluate the effects of slow vs. rapid rates of advancement of enteral feed volumes on the clinical outcomes in preterm infants with a low birth weight. This study showed that neonates in the rapid feeding advancement group achieved full enteral volume feedings earlier than the slower advancement group. They also received significantly fewer days of parenteral nutrition, exhibited a shorter time to regain birth weight and had shorter duration of hospital stay. The incidence of necrotizing enterocolitis and the number of episodes of feeding intolerance were not significantly different between the groups. However the incidence of culture-proven late-onset sepsis was significantly less in infants receiving rapid feeding advancement.

• In 2013, Ramani, et al, reviewed the literature and concluded that the evidence was convincing that human mild feeding, compared with formula feeding reduced the incidence of NEC in preterm infants. They also found that in clinically stable very low birth weight (VLBW) infants, the early introduction of progressive feeds and advancement of feeds at a faster rate (30-35 mL/kg/d) was safe and did not increase the incidence of NEC. In addition they noted that the use of human mild-based fortifier compared with bovine based fortifier may reduce the incident of NEC although additional studies are still required.

• In 2007, Kirk, et al, performed a prospective study and compared it against historic cohort controls to determine whether cue based clinical pathway for oral feeding initiation and advancement in premature infants would result in earlier achievement of full oral feeding. The study found that cue based clinical pathway for oral feeding initiation and advancement of premature infants resulted in earlier achievement of full oral feeding.
### Clinical Evidence (continued)

- In 2013, Fujinaga, et al, performed a study of 60 clinically stable preterm infants to determine accuracy, sensitivity and specificity of Preterm Oral Feeding Readiness Assessment Scale cut-offs, compared to milk intake through translactation. The global accuracy of Preterm Oral Feeding Readiness Assessment Scale was 74.38%. The highest sensitivity and specificity were obtained for three cut-offs: 28, 29 and 30. The authors concluded that the Preterm Oral Feeding Readiness Assessment Scale is a valid to assist health professionals to initiate preterm feeding in view of promoting safe and objective breast feeding.

- In a 2012 Cochrane Neonatal Review article by Crowe L, et al, regarding instruments assessing readiness to feed, they found that there were no randomized or quasi-randomized trials comparing formal instruments to assess a preterm infant’s readiness to commence suck feeds with either no instruments (usual practice) or other feeding readiness instruments. However, they did note that there were several feeding readiness scales available including the Preterm Infant Nipple Feeding Readiness Scale and the Early Feeding Skill Assessment Tool. The authors concluded that the benefit of using a formalized instrument over other methods such as clinical judgment or a criterion such as gestational age is that an instrument ensures that a systematic and consistent method of assessing feeding readiness is utilized. However, the absence of randomized or quasi-randomized trails may also be a reflection of the practical difficulties in ensuring that the comparison group is not exposed to the intervention, particularly in the situation where the use of an instrument compared to normal clinical practice with direct caregivers collecting data.

- In 2005 article by Thoyre, et al, the authors discussed the use of the Early Feeding Skill (EFS) Assessment. The authors noted that the EFS was a 36-item observational measure of oral feeding skill that could be used from the time of initiation of oral feeding through maturation of oral feeding skill. They indicated that the EFS provided a means of identifying, for individual preterm infants, areas of strength and areas in which support was required to accomplish safe and effective feeding.

- In 2008, Puckett, et al performed a prospective randomized trial to see if infants fed orally on feeding cues could be discharged home earlier than infants fed by traditional feeding regimens. The authors concluded that cue based feeding was possible for premature infants with similar weight gain as traditional feeding without affecting workload.

- In a 2013 article by White, et al, the authors noted that cue-based feeding is an approach that is more developmentally appropriate for a premature infant. They noted that there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that infants may have better neuro-developmental outcomes if they are allowed to demonstrate their emerging feeding competence through their individual behavior, muscle tone, reflexes and movements before, during and after attempts to feed orally. In addition, it has been found that specific gestational age (commonly between 32 and 34 weeks) is not the only criteria for determining when to commence oral feeding and have suggested that observation of infant behavior and physiological maturation are better indicators of feeding readiness.

- In 2013, Swant, et al, reviewed the literature and concluded that the majority of cue-based feeding studies have demonstrated that best practice entails individualization of care and consideration of the infant experience during feeding interventions to promote the successful development and attainment of full oral feedings. However, as the research currently stands, there is not sufficient evidence to support the implementation of a specific cue-based feeding protocol based on improving weight gain or shortening length of stay.
### Clinical Evidence (continued)

- In a 2013 article by Shaker, the author noted that a focus on emptying the bottle or defining an empty bottle as success may negatively affect the preterm infant’s feeding experience and have adverse effects on neuromaturation and on feeding outcomes. Lack of contingent response to infant’s communication may lead to maladaptive feeding behaviors, learned feeding refusals and long term feeding aversions.

- In 2012, Lau, et al, performed a randomized study to determine if specific and swallowing exercises versus no intervention accelerated the attainment of independent oral feeding through a faster maturation of infants’ oral feeding skills. The authors concluded that the swallowing exercises were an efficacious intervention in facilitating the attainment of independent oral feeding but not the sucking exercises. The authors speculated that the swallowing benefit resulted from an accelerated maturation of infants’ oral feeding skill level.

- In 2012, a randomized study by Fucile et al, investigated the effects of an oral (O), tactile/kinesthetic (T/K) and combined (O + T/K) sensorimotor intervention on preterm infants’ nutritive sucking, swallowing and their coordination with respiration. All three interventions resulted in improved swallow-respiration coordination.

- In 2005, Pinelli conducted a systematic review of 21 studies, 15 of which were randomized controlled trials and concluded that nonnutritive sucking (NNS) decreases significantly the length of hospital stay in preterm infants, facilitates the transition from tube to bottle feeds and better bottle feeding performance. The review did not reveal a consistent benefit of NNS with respect to other major clinical variables (weight gain, energy intake, heart rate, oxygen saturation, intestinal transit time, age at full oral feeds and behavioral state).

- In 2013, a randomized trial by Barlow et al, evaluated the effects of a frequency-modulated (FM) orocutaneous pulse train delivered through a pneumatically charged pacifier on enhancing non-nutritive suck (NNS) activity in tube-fed premature infants with or without significant lung disease. The authors of the study concluded that FM PULSED orocutaneous pulse stimuli are effective in facilitating NNS burst development in tube-fed respiratory distress syndrome (RDS) and chronic lung disease (CLD) preterm infants, with an added benefit of reduced length of stay for CLD infants by an average of 2.5 days.

- In 2005, Scheel, et al, performed a trial to see if feeding performance could be improved by using a bottle nipple with the physical characteristics that enhanced an infant’s sucking skills. While the authors could not identify a particular bottle nipple that enhanced bottle feeding in healthy very low weight infants, they did speculate that infants could modify their sucking skills in order to maintain a rate of mild transfer that was appropriate with the level of suck-swallow-breathe coordination. They concluded that caretakers should be more concerned over monitoring the coordination of suck-swallow-breathe than over selection of bottle nipples.

- In a 1997 article by Lau, et al, the authors performed a study to assess infant feeding performance during unrestricted milk flow versus restricted milk flow. The authors concluded that a restricted milk flow facilitated oral feeding in infants younger than 30 weeks of gestation.
Clinical Evidence (continued)

• A 2013 article by Czinn, et al, noted that gastroesophageal reflux, defined as the involuntary retrograde passage of gastric contents into the esophagus with or without regurgitation or vomiting, was a physiologic condition, which occurred several times a day. The authors noted that about 70-85% of infants had regurgitation within the first 2 months of life and that it resolved without intervention in 95% of infants by 1 year of age. The authors also noted that GER disease (GERD) occurred when reflux of gastric contents caused symptoms that affected the quality of life or pathological complications such as failure to thrive, feeding or sleeping problems, chronic respiratory disorders, esophagitis, hematemesis, apnea and apparent life-threatening events. For non-complicated reflux, no intervention was required for most infants. Effective parental reassurance and educating parents regarding regurgitation and lifestyle changes, adjusting feeding regimes, positioning and environmental smoke exposure were usually sufficient to manage infant reflux. For infants diagnosed with GERD, non-pharmacologic approaches were first-line therapy. For those infants with GERD who did not respond to supportive measures or who relapsed, a limited trial of acid suppression therapy was warranted.

• In 2014, a review of the literature by Rosen, found that gastroesophageal reflux is a common physiologic process with more than 60% of infants spitting up on a daily basis and as many of 25% of the infants spitting up 4 or more times per day. Gastroesophageal reflux (GER) changes to gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) when the reflux of gastric contents causes troublesome symptoms or complications. Treatment therapies fall into 3 categories: non-pharmacologic, pharmacologic and surgical. Non-pharmacologic therapies include positioning, thickening of feedings, changes in formula and modification of meal frequencies. The mainstay of medical therapy for GERD in infants is acid suppression, although acid suppression increases the burden of nonacid reflux, which is already much higher in infants than in older children and may worsen symptoms. The two primary surgical options for the treatment of intractable GER are fundoplication and transpyloric feeding in patients who are fed enterally. The author concluded that acid suppression has not been shown to reduce symptoms typically associated with reflux. Although a role for acid suppression exists in infants with evidence of esophagitis or with gastrointestinal tract bleeding, use of acid suppression in infants with symptoms should be limited to a short trial of acid suppression therapy. In addition, due to conflicting studies, fundoplication cannot be recommended for every infant with ALTE and GER-positive test results. Further, non-pharmacologic measures should be used whenever possible because most infants with GER will resolve without intervention.

• In 2008, a review of the literature by Horvath, et al, of thickened feeds on gastroesophageal reflux found that use of thickened formulas compared with standard formula significantly increased the percentage of infants with no regurgitation, slightly reduced the number of episodes of regurgitation and vomiting per day (assessed jointly or separately), and increased weight gain per day; it had no effect on the reflux index, number of acid gastroesophageal reflux episodes per hour, or number of reflux episodes lasting >5 minutes but significantly reduced the duration of the longest reflux episode of pH<4.

• In 2013, Davidson et al, performed a randomized, double blind, placebo-controlled study to evaluate the efficacy and safety of proton pump inhibitors in infants aged < 1 year with gastroesophageal reflux disease. The authors concluded that the signs and symptoms of GERD traditionally attributed to acidic reflux in neonates were not significantly altered by esomeprazole treatment. Esomeprazole was well tolerated and reduced esophageal acid exposure and the number of acidic reflux events in neonates but did not reduce the incidence or severity of nonacidic reflux. Therefore routine use of these agents is not recommended.
Bibliography


Atkinson SA. Special nutritional needs of infants for prevention of and recovery from broncho-pulmonary dysplasia. J Nutr 2001; 131:942S.


Cochrane Review entitled Instruments for assessing readiness to commence suck feeds in preterm infants: effects on time to establish full oral feeding and duration of hospitalization. The reviewers are Crowe L, Chang A, and Wallace K. It was first published in 2012.


Revision History

The following are approved changes incorporated into the revision numbers indicated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revision</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V1.0</td>
<td>05/16/2013</td>
<td>New guideline (MB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2.0</td>
<td>01/07/2014</td>
<td>Job Aid revised into Medical Necessity Clinical Guideline (LK)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>