

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Premature Babies and Physical Therapy

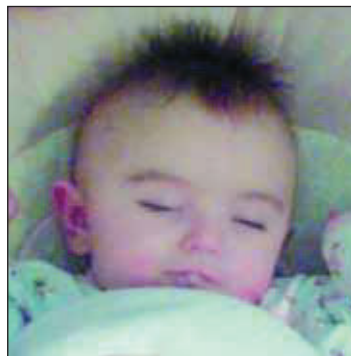
In Pennsylvania, more than 17,000 babies are born too soon each year, before their lungs, brains or other organs are fully developed (March of Dimes, 2010). But, there is hope. Since premature babies are more "at-risk" for developmental delays and many require a stay in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), they are automatically tracked to receive Early Intervention (EI) services. These EI services may include occupational, physical, and speech therapy, as well as developmental, vision, hearing and nutrition services. EI services are provided for children ages birth to three in the home or community setting and are at no cost to the family in Pennsylvania.

A common need for babies born prematurely is physical therapy. Since most babies are born curled up and preemies are born extended, physical therapy may be required to "bring them back to their middle." Because many premature babies are hooked up to life-saving support such as oxygen for the first few weeks after birth, they remain extended and can be sensitive to touch. The key is to bring their hands to their middle (chest) and teach them that touch is good.

Three-year old Janelle is a wonderful example of how physical therapy can help a child excel. Born early with a few complications at birth, Janelle began receiving physical therapy through The Early Learning Institute (TELI) at nine months old. When she began therapy, she kept her head way to the side, did not look at anybody, startled at everything and to her, touch was unpleasant. Right away, TELI physical therapist Kay Donovan began "putting Janelle back together," by making things less scary for her and continually bringing Janelle to her center.

"That is when we found Janelle," said Kay. "Soon, she had head control and her own little personality." And, through continued therapies, Janelle can now roll, pivot, scoot, sit independently and stand with support. Kay believes her job is to ensure that babies and their parents have a better time together. Janelle's mother, Jennifer, agrees. "They've given us resources and the confidence to be able to take care of our child."

> For more information about **The Early Learning Institute (TELI)**, call (412) 922-8322 or visit www.telipa.org.



Janelle as a baby



Janelle now

Why Breastfeeding Matters: 5 Things for New Mothers

By Dr. Renee B. Hickman, M.D.

A recent study released in Pittsburgh indicated that more needs to be done in hospitals to support new mothers and encourage them to breastfeed. If you are a first-time mother, these tips may help:

1) Remember, breastfeeding is about more than just nutrition.

Offering a complete infant support system, breastfeeding leads to babies with less respiratory infections, allergies, eczema, asthma, and a decreased risk of diabetes. Nothing beats holding your baby close, bonding and knowing they will be sick less often. Formula is not even close to breast milk in terms of the benefits it can offer.

2) Find out if your Doctor will commit to a breastfeeding partnership

Some physicians place a high value on breastfeeding and others do not. Before your baby is born, talk to your doctor to find out if he or she will commit to offering you 24/7 support.

3) Ask for help when you need it.

Just because it is natural to breastfeed, that does not mean it is easy, particularly given the sleep deprivation of the first few weeks. Before you get discouraged, ask for help. Call your doctor, come to the office or contact a lactation helpline or La Leche League for support.

4) Have an Enforcer.

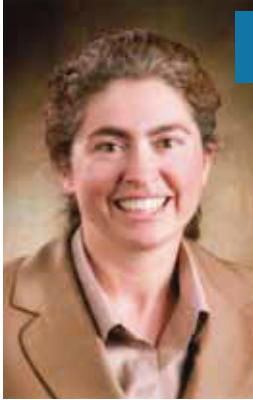
In the early days of breastfeeding, privacy and rest are critical. Designate a spouse, friend or relative to be your enforcer, assuring that you get the privacy and rest you need. Let them encourage people to bring food and visit no longer than 15 minutes.

5) Remember, it gets easier.

The first few weeks with a new baby can be daunting. It gets easier. Beyond its spectacular health benefits, breastfeeding is convenient and efficient, saving time and money. Breastfeeding exclusively for the first 4-6 months is ideal and new moms should nurse their babies as long as they can.

In many ways, breastfeeding is like learning to dance with a new partner. It takes patience. Parents who want the best for their child understand the importance of using a car seat to assure that their child is safe. Breastfeeding is no different. It matters that much.

> Dr. Renee B. Hickman is a member of the team of physicians at **Premier Medical Associates** and the **Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine**. For more information, visit www.premiermedicalassociates.com.

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