Transition to Breastfeeding Decision Tree
for High Risk Infants

Is MOB available?

Yes

Mother assesses her infant’s level of interest in feeding:

“Is your baby;
• aroused?
• rooting?
• showing hunger cues?”

No

Nurse to assess infant’s level of interest in feeding:

Is the baby;
• aroused?
• rooting?
• showing hunger cues?

Yes

Gavage:

• preferably while held at the breast
• offer “empty” breast, finger, or pacifier with taste of milk during feeding (provide NNS)
• over a minimum of 20-30”

No

Choose Alternate Feeding Method:

• bottle nipple

Gavage:

• over a minimum of 20-30”
• hold during feeding if possible
• offer q-tip, pacifier, or small rinsed gloved finger with taste of EMM during feeding

Breastfeeding Behaviors:

Infant is able to;
• maintain physiologic stability - HR, RR, SpO₂, color
• effective suck
• coordinate suck, swallow, breathe
• maintain motor stability - flexion, tone
• maintain an awake state - alert or active state, but not crying

Length of Feeding:

• variable; based on
  - endurance
  - energy level
  - medical condition
• use identified behaviors to decide length of feeding
• total feeding time, including supplementation, should not exceed 40-45”

Feeding Behaviors:

Infant is able to;
• coordinate suck, swallow, and breathe, while
• maintaining physiologic stability
• motor stability - flexion, tone
• an awake state
• alert or active state but not crying

Before and After Weights:

Consider when pattern of some sustained sucking established

Yes

Based on Weight:

• Gavage full feeding if intake minimal
• Gavage partial feeding as indicated by ingested milk volume
• Gavage over 15-20”

No ac/po weights due to inefficient and/or ineffective sucking:

• Gavage full feeding preferably at the breast
• Gavage over minimum 15-20”

No

Consider consultation to differentiate normal disorganization from dysfunctional oral motor behaviors:

• Lactation Consultant
• Speech Language Pathologist
• Occupational /Physical Therapist


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