

POCKET GUIDE TO
**Neonatal
Nutrition**
THIRD EDITION

Pediatric Nutrition Practice Group

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Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Pocket Guide to Neonatal Nutrition, Third Edition

ISBN 978-0-88091-221-1 (print)
ISBN 978-0-88091-222-8 (eBook)
Catalog Number 423823 (print)
Catalog Number 423823e (eBook)

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hodges, S. Bethany, editor. | Johnson, Michelle (Research scientist), editor. | Barr, Stephanie Merlino, editor. | Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Pediatric Nutrition Practice Group, issuing body.

Title: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics pocket guide to neonatal nutrition / Pediatric Nutrition Practice Group ; editors: Bethany Hodges, Michelle Johnson, Stephanie Merlino.

Other titles: ADA pocket guide to neonatal nutrition. | Pocket guide to neonatal nutrition

Description: Third edition. | Chicago, IL : Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, [2022] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022019772 (print) | LCCN 2022019773 (ebook) | ISBN 9780880912211 (spiral bound) | ISBN 9780880912228 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Premature infants--Nutrition--Handbooks, manuals, etc.

Classification: LCC RJ281 .A33 2022 (print) | LCC RJ281 (ebook) | DDC 618.92/011--dc23/eng/20220627

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022019772>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022019773>

Contents

Editors and Contributors	v
Reviewers	viii
Preface	x
Acknowledgments	xi
Terminology to Describe Human Milk Feedings	xii
Chapter 1: Nutrition Assessment.....	1
Chapter 2: Parenteral Nutrition.....	33
Chapter 3: Enteral Nutrition.....	68
Chapter 4: Respiratory Disease.....	100
Chapter 5: Common Cardiovascular Disorders in Newborns.....	121
Chapter 6: Necrotizing Enterocolitis.....	130
Chapter 7: Short Bowel Syndrome and Intestinal Failure.....	143
Chapter 8: Hyperbilirubinemia.....	169
Chapter 9: Congenital Anomalies of the Alimentary Tract.....	182
Chapter 10: Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease.....	189
Chapter 11: Renal Function.....	196
Chapter 12: Neurologic Disorders.....	212
Chapter 13: Inherited Metabolic Disorders.....	224
Chapter 14: Endocrine Disorders.....	232
Chapter 15: Metabolic Bone Disease of Prematurity.....	249

Chapter 16: Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome and Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome	256
Chapter 17: Late Preterm Infant	265
Chapter 18: Discharge and Follow-Up	281
Appendixes	
Appendix A: Conversion Tables	311
Appendix B: Essential Parenteral and Enteral Feeding Calculations: Neonatal Intensive Care Unit	318
Appendix C: Neonatal Intensive Care Unit Nutrition Products	326
Appendix D: Nonstandard Enteral Feeding Calculations Using Powdered Formula	341
Continuing Professional Education.....	348
Index	349

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Preface

This pocket guide for neonatal nutrition evolved from a collaboration of leaders in the field of neonatal nutrition that spanned several decades, beginning in 1985 with the publication of *Nutritional Care for High Risk Newborns*. Sharon Groh-Wargo, Melody Thompson, and Janice Hovasi Cox, editors of *Nutritional Care for High-Risk Newborns*, second and third editions; and the *Pocket Guide to Neonatal Nutrition*, first and second editions; dedicated their careers to caring for the smallest and most fragile patients—premature infants. Their work in clinical care, research, and education has benefited patients, families, dietitians, and the varied health care professionals in the neonatal intensive care unit.

Since the publication of the second edition of the *Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Pocket Guide to Neonatal Nutrition*, the responsibility of this storied text has been passed to a new group of editors who are honored to fill the shoes of their predecessors and mentors.

This third edition of the *Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Pocket Guide to Neonatal Nutrition* contains updated information in the key areas of neonatal nutrition: nutrition assessment, parenteral nutrition, enteral nutrition, and discharge/follow-up. This text also provides updates to typical disease states seen in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), such as necrotizing enterocolitis, neonatal abstinence syndrome and neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome, and short bowel syndrome and intestinal failure. The third edition includes several new chapters and appendixes including:

- dedicated chapters on neurologic disorders (Chapter 12) and metabolic disorders (Chapter 13),
- discussion of the late preterm infant (Chapter 17),
- essential parenteral and enteral calculations (Appendix B),
- enteral product overview (Appendix C), and
- nonstandard enteral feeding calculations (Appendix D).

Acknowledgments

We thank the authors, reviewers, and Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics team who worked on the *Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Pocket Guide to Neonatal Nutrition*, third edition, throughout the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a time of much uncertainty, they worked diligently to update this valued resource utilizing evidence-based practice and thoughtful clinical perspective.

Terminology to Describe Human Milk Feedings

Expressed human milk (EHM) refers to human milk produced by the biological parent of the infant and is the term we will use throughout this text for consistency. Other terms commonly used to describe this type of human milk include expressed breast milk (EBM), mother's own milk (MOM), and mother's/maternal breast milk (MBM).

Breastfeeding refers to the method of feeding an infant directly at breast.

Donor human milk (DHM) refers to human milk processed by a human milk bank or company. Donor breast milk (DBM) and donor milk (DM) are other terms commonly used to describe this type of human milk.

Our choices of terminology in this text reflect typically used industry terms and allow for distinction of the types of human milk used in the neonatal intensive care unit environment.

It is important to be thoughtful about the use of gendered language in a clinical setting to reflect the diversity of individuals who lactate and include the transgender and gender-nonconforming community. For example, not all lactating individuals may identify as mothers, and there are individuals who prefer the term *chestfeeding* over *breastfeeding*. Selection of appropriate terminology in the clinical setting should be done with this in mind.

CHAPTER 1

Nutrition Assessment

Melody Thompson, MS, RDN, LD

Introduction

Nutrition assessment in infants includes the following components:

- anthropometric assessment;
- biochemical assessment;
- clinical assessment; and
- dietary intake assessment (parenteral, enteral, and oral).

In addition, infant nutrition assessment includes classification of gestational age (GA) and size for gestational age.

A nutrition screen—often completed by a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) nurse or dietetic technician, registered—may be used to focus registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) resources. Screening should be completed within 24 hours of admission.^{1,2} See Box 1.1 (page 2) and Figure 1.1 (page 3) for examples of screening criteria and a screening tool, respectively.^{3,4} An RDN then completes an assessment of infants meeting designated criteria. Neonatal nutritionists may want to lead the development or revision of unit-specific screening tools and nutrition assessment priorities, considering NICU feeding protocols (to prevent or delay nutrition risk) and RDN staffing.

BOX 1.1 Ohio Neonatal Nutritionists Screening Criteria for Identifying Hospitalized Infants at Highest Nutritional Risk**<1 Week of age**

>15% weight loss from birth weight
<1 kg at birth

1 to 2 Weeks of age

<70 kcal/kg/d
Any continued weight loss

>2 Weeks of age

Intake <80% expected energy requirement

- <70 kcal/kg/d (all intravenous)
- <85 kcal/kg/d (intravenous/enteral)
- <100 kcal/kg/d (all enteral)

<15 g/kg/d weight gain (<36 weeks' gestational age) or <½ expected g/d weight gain (>36 weeks' gestational age)

Prealbumin^a <8.0 mg/dL, or albumin <2.5 g/dL

Blood urea nitrogen <7 mg/dL

Direct bilirubin >2.0 mg/dL

Serum phosphorus <4 mg/dL

Alkaline phosphatase >600 U/L

>2 Months of age

Any of the above for >2 weeks of age plus:

- no source of dietary iron
- continued total parenteral nutrition

Any infant with newly diagnosed necrotizing enterocolitis, bronchopulmonary dysplasia, cholestasis, osteopenia, cardiac disorders, neurologic problems, gastrointestinal surgical anomalies, or metabolic aberrations

Any infant with birth weight <1.5 kg (and current weight <2 kg) and receiving full feedings but not receiving fortified human milk or preterm formula

^aInclude as criteria only if screening can be done in a time-efficient manner for entire unit; use values only as guide—compare with institutional normal ranges; although not reliable during inflammatory states, may indicate the infant with increased nutrition needs.

Adapted with permission from Thompson M. Establishing and developing the position of the neonatal nutritionist. In: Groh-Wargo S, Thompson M, Cox JH, eds. *Nutritional Care for High-Risk Newborns*. Precept Press; 2000:605. See source 3.

Affix patient label here

Neonatal nutritional screening tool

To be completed on admission and weekly (every Monday)

Gestation at birth:

Birth weight:

1. Assess growth

Current weight:		Current centile:		Birth centile:	
Current OFC:		Current centile:		Birth centile:	
Current length:		Current centile:		Birth centile:	

2. Determine risk category *Check all that apply*

High risk	Any one of:	
	• Preterm <28 weeks at birth	
	• Extremely low birth weight < 1,000 g	
	• Infant establishing feeds after episode of NEC or GI perforation	
Moderate risk	Any one of:	
	• Preterm 28–31 ⁺⁶ weeks, otherwise well	
	• IUGR (weight <9 th centile) and AREFV <35 weeks	
	• Very low birth weight 1,000–1,500 g	
Low risk	Any one of:	
	• Preterm 32–36 ⁺⁶ weeks, otherwise well	
	• IUGR (weight < 9 th centile) and AREFV >35 weeks	
	• Well Term Infant ≥37 weeks	

3. Determine the need for nutrition team review *Check all that apply*

The nutrition team should review any infant meeting the following criteria:

• High risk infants according to criteria above	
• Not regained birth weight by 2 weeks of age	
• >15% weight loss at any time	
• Weight gain < 10g/kg/day from 2 weeks of age onwards	
• NEC or GI surgery at any time	

Name of person completing assessment: _____ Signature: _____

If completing admission assessment, please file in the baby's nursing folder, next to the nutrition flow charts

If completing a weekly assessment, please place this form in the nutrition screening box

FIGURE 1.1 Neonatal nutrition screening tool example

OPFC, occipitofrontal circumference; AREFV, absent or reversed end-diastolic flow velocity; GI, gastrointestinal; IUGR, intrauterine growth restriction; NEC, necrotizing enterocolitis. Reproduced with permission from Johnson MJ, Pearson F, Emm A, Moyses HE, Leaf AA. Developing a new screening tool for nutritional risk in neonatal intensive care. *Acta Paediatrica*. 2015;104(2):e90-e93. doi:10.1111/apa.12855. See source 4.

The screening tool shown in Figure 1.1 was developed and retrospectively validated (90% sensitivity, 75% specificity) in an NICU in the United Kingdom.⁴ Only infants identified as high risk in section two of the tool and those in section three were seen by the NICU nutrition support team. This tool was developed for its ease of use by nursing staff. As such, it lacks information on nutrient intake, which, according to the definition of neonatal malnutrition, is the only indicator used in the first 2 weeks of life.⁵ The growth assessment uses percentiles and not *z* scores. These are limitations of the use of this tool.

Newborn Classification of Gestational Age and Birth Weight

Newborn infant maturity and intrauterine growth are classified by GA, birth weight (BW), and weight for gestational age using terminology in Box 1.2.

GA can be estimated by maternal dates and by early (first or early second trimester) ultrasound examination (if available). The GA is also determined in the NICU by examining the infant's physical and neurological development via a reliable standardized instrument called the New Ballard score (available online at www.ballardscore.com).⁶ The GA classifies the infant as preterm, term, or postterm.

These classifications of GA, BW, and size for age can help guide or anticipate clinical care needs. For example, babies who are postterm, small for gestational age (SGA), or large for gestational age (LGA) are more likely to have hypoglycemia, polycythemia, birth asphyxia, and specific syndromes or anomalies than are term babies who are appropriate for gestational age. Prematurity is also associated with a host of potential morbidities, many of which are discussed in this pocket guide.

The extrauterine growth restriction (EUGR) designation requires careful evaluation of the individual infant's intake and overall growth trajectory. Extrauterine growth restriction has recently been described as a misnomer for preterm infants because it does not consider initial fluid weight loss and is based on weight only, using an arbitrary percentile cutoff that would include those who are genetically destined to be small. Of additional concern is that assigning this designation can risk

BOX 1.2 Gestational Age and Birth Weight Classifications**Gestational age (GA)**

Preterm/premature <37 weeks' GA

Late preterm ≥34 to <37 weeks' GA

Term 37 to 42 weeks' GA

Postterm >42 weeks' GA

Birth weight (BW)

Normal BW 2,500 to 4,500 g (5 lb, 8 oz to 8 lb, 8 oz)

Low birth weight (LBW) <2,500 g (5 lb, 8 oz)

Very low birth weight (VLBW) <1,500 g (3 lb, 5 oz)

Extremely low birth weight (ELBW) <1,000 g (2 lb, 3 oz)

Size for age

Small for gestational age (SGA) <10th percentile BW for GA

Appropriate for gestational age (AGA) 10th to 90th percentile BW for GA

Large for gestational age (LGA) >90th percentile BW for GA

Intrauterine growth restriction (IUGR) or fetal growth restriction (FGR) <10th percentile estimated fetal weight

Extrauterine growth restriction (EUGR) <10th percentile weight for corrected GA at hospital discharge

the infant being fed more than is needed nutritionally.⁷ Careful consideration of genetic potential (eg, parental size) and watchful intervention to provide optimal nourishment and avoid overfeeding may be warranted for infants assigned the EUGR designation.

Anthropometric Assessment

Postnatal growth—with consistent and comprehensive monitoring—is an important health care outcome measure for high-risk infants. Anthropometric measurements are rapid, inexpensive, and noninvasive to obtain.

Measurement of body weight, length, and head circumference (HC) is the predominant method used to monitor infant growth, detect growth

abnormalities, and assess nutritional status in infants. Measurements are plotted on growth curves for comparison with established reference data. Serial measures of growth are compulsory for assessing response to nutrition support in hospitalized infants. Satisfactory postnatal growth is associated with shortened lengths of hospitalization and improved cognitive development.^{8,9}

Weight

The nude infant is weighed, in grams, on a regularly calibrated, digital scale.

Uses and Interpretation

Body weight comprises the total mass of the infant's lean tissue, fat, and extracellular and intracellular fluid compartments. As GA increases, extracellular fluid volume decreases and lean tissue and fat mass increase. Initial postnatal weight loss is attributed to contraction of body water compartments and catabolism of endogenous stores before energy and nutrient needs are met.¹⁰ Consider the following when assessing postnatal weight changes:

- Expected initial postnatal weight loss ranges between 5% and 14%, with greater loss found in the smallest, most immature infants, and those with restricted fluid intake.^{11,12}
- Initial weight loss reaches its nadir by 5 days of life.¹²
- Birth weight is optimally regained by 2 weeks but may take longer to reach in infants with extreme prematurity or severe illness.^{12,13}

Two commonly used methods of comparing a preterm infant's growth with growth standards are the *z* score method and the growth velocity (GV) model.¹⁴ The first method involves using the BW *z* score as the goal; nutrition prescriptions can be adjusted in continued pursuit of this goal. An online calculator, PediTools (<https://peditools.org>), can predict desired weights to maintain this *z* score as the infant grows.¹⁵ This approach, however, does not take the initial fluid weight loss into account, so the infant may be fed to grow in a nonphysiologic way.¹⁶

The GV model uses a GV goal of 15 to 20 g/kg/d for infants from 23 to 36 weeks' GA.¹⁷ Actual GV can be calculated using the following equation:

$$\text{GV (g/kg/d)} = \frac{[1,000 \times (W_n - W_1)]}{\{(D_n - D_1) \times [\frac{(W_n + W_1)}{2}]\}}$$

where W is weight in grams, D is day, 1 refers to the beginning of the time interval chosen, and n is the end of that time interval in days. For example, here is how to calculate GV for an infant who weighs 1,100 g on day 12 and 1,400 g on day 26:

$$\text{GV} = \frac{[1,000 \times (1,440 - 1,100)]}{\{(26 - 12) \times [\frac{(1,440 + 1,100)}{2}]\}}$$

$$\text{GV} = \frac{1,000 \times 340}{14 \times 1270}$$

$$\text{GV} = \frac{340,000}{17,780}$$

$$\text{GV} = 19.1 \text{ g/kg/d}$$

This equation, which uses average weight in the denominator, is more accurate than methods using BW or other weights in the denominator.

In addition to these methods, a novel approach to assess growth is called the individualized growth trajectory, which is supported by investigators who are concerned that cross-sectional charts reflecting intrauterine growth do not allow for the initial weight loss seen after birth.^{16,18,19} Expecting an infant to continue along the same birth z score is likely not physiologic and promotes unhealthy growth. The individualized growth trajectory approach combines physiologic changes and growth goals for different stages, which include intrauterine growth until birth, physiologic postnatal fluid weight loss and weight nadir (at approximately 1 week of age), stable growth along a new trajectory (typically 0.8 z scores below the birth z score) parallel to the former predicted

trajectory using BW, and transition to term-equivalent growth. Whether following the individualized growth trajectory will minimize future cardiometabolic risk associated with abnormal body composition (increased fat or decreased lean body mass) frequently seen in former preterm infants at term-corrected age is unknown. A free online calculator for individualized postnatal growth trajectories for preterm infants is available at growthcalculator.org.²⁰

Weight gain cannot accurately reflect lean body mass changes, especially when edema or dehydration is present. This is a limitation to using weight gain as an independent indicator of postnatal growth. Additional factors contributing to insufficient or excessive weight gain are listed in Box 1.3.

Length

Obtaining an accurate linear measurement using an infant length board requires two people. One person holds the infant's head against the fixed headboard; the other measurer gently flattens the infant's knees and guides the footboard toward the infant's flat feet. Although not recommended, in some clinical settings, infant length is estimated using a tape measure, sacrificing accuracy for expediency.

Uses and Interpretation

Weekly length measurements have the following advantages over the measurement of weight in that length more accurately reflects lean tissue mass, length is not influenced by fluid status, and length is a better indicator of long-term growth. Factors that may contribute to poor length gain include nutrient insufficiencies (eg, protein, minerals, energy), severity of illness, feedings withheld, systemic steroids, genetic conditions, and congenital anomalies.^{9,21}

Expected incremental gain in crown-heel length in low-birth-weight (LBW) infants is approximately 1 cm/wk.^{18,19}

Limitations

Length is often more difficult to accurately determine—requiring a length board and two measurers—than either weight or HC.²²

BOX 1.3 Insufficient or Excessive Weight Gain**Factors that may contribute to poor weight gain (<15 g/kg/d)**

Insufficient fluid, energy, or nutrient intake

Improper preparation of feeding

Feeding intolerance (eg, feedings held, abnormal stools, regurgitation)

Acidosis

Hypoxia

Hyponatremia

Anemia

Chronic diuretic administration

Temperature instability or cold stress

Increased metabolic rate; increased work of breathing

Sepsis or infection

Factors that may contribute to excessive weight gain (>35 g/d)

Excessive fluid, energy, or nutrient intake

Improper preparation of feeding

Chronic systemic steroid administration (in addition to excessive weight gain, this treatment may contribute to the loss of lean mass and decrease in linear growth)

Head Circumference

The largest occipital frontal circumference, HC is measured with a flexible, nonstretchable tape measure.

Uses and Interpretation

When monitoring HC, the following should be noted:

- During the first postnatal week, HC may decrease by approximately 0.5 cm due to extracellular fluid space contraction.
- Head circumference is monitored weekly; mean gain in LBW infants is 1 cm/wk, with velocity decreasing as the infant

approaches term.^{18,19} PediTools may be used as a resource to help determine individual goals.¹⁵

- More frequent assessment may be indicated for infants with microcephaly or macrocephaly or with suspected abnormal increases in HC (>1.25 cm/wk).

Limitations

Cerebral edema, hydrocephalus, compression due to the administration device for nasal continuous positive airway pressure, scalp intravenous (IV) access, presence or absence of hair, or the addition or removal of external apparatus may interfere with accuracy of HC measurements.

Body Proportionality

Body proportionality measures in neonates include weight-for-length, body mass index (BMI; calculated as weight divided by length squared), and the ponderal index (weight divided by length cubed). The accuracy of the infant's length measurement is of utmost importance in these equations—particularly in the BMI and ponderal index when the length measurement is squared or cubed—because any potential measurement error is magnified.

Weight-for-length curves are available on World Health Organization (WHO) growth charts for term infants; these charts have weight and length curves on one side and HC and weight-for-length curves on the opposite side. For preterm infants, BMI has been reported to be more appropriate to assess body proportionality than using either weight for length or the ponderal index.²³ Sex-specific BMI charts for preterm infants have been developed and validated.²⁴ An infant's BMI can be calculated using PediTools or manually—using the equation $(\text{g}/\text{cm}^2) \times 10$ —and plotted on the appropriate BMI curve. Longitudinal BMI charts are also available for use with infants remaining in the NICU.²⁵

Uses and Interpretation

Although determining BMI can be useful when assessing symmetry of growth, interpretation is difficult in preterm infants who have low lean mass and delayed length growth.⁷ Body proportionality interpretation

should be approached with caution and only when the length measurement is known to be accurate.

Regional Anthropometry

At term-corrected age, preterm infants have a higher proportion of body fat and lower proportion of lean mass than do their term-born counterparts. Body composition can be measured by air displacement plethysmography, bioelectrical impedance, isotope dilution techniques, magnetic resonance imaging, and a combination of manual measurements of skinfolds and circumferences called regional anthropometry. These methods can be used to estimate fat mass, fat-free mass, and distribution of body fat.^{26,27} Although regional anthropometry is gaining traction, it is not routinely assessed in many NICUs. It is used primarily in research settings.

Uses and Interpretation

Skinfolds (to assess subcutaneous fat) and limb circumferences, or the ratios and formulas derived from these measurements, have potential as predictors of body composition, growth, and metabolic complications for infants who are overgrown or undergrown. These measurements may be most useful in patients with conditions such as ascites or large hydrocephalus, or who are conjoined twins; and in patients with plaster casts and other conditions in which body weight alone may be misleading.

Well-established standard values that are validated against a reference body composition method are not available. However, the infant's own measurements can be compared over time during hospitalization.

Limitations

Examiner measurement-technique variability, as well as critical illness, hydration status, and positioning of infants, can make these measurements invalid or unreliable. The use of calipers to measure skinfolds may not be feasible in extremely immature infants who have delicate, easily punctured skin.

Index

Page numbers followed by *f* indicate figures, page number followed by *t* indicates tables, and page numbers followed by *b* indicate boxes.

- AAP. *See* American Academy of Pediatrics
- access for parenteral nutrition, 57, 58*b*
- acetate, 46–47, 204
- acid-suppressing medications, 192
- acute kidney injury (AKI), 197–198, 204
- characteristics of, 208
- dialysis, 207
- discharge considerations, 210
- Kidney Disease: Improving Global Outcome classification, 208–209, 209*b*
- preventive nutrition, 199
- treatment nutrition, 205
- AGA. *See* appropriate for gestational age infants
- AKI. *See* acute kidney injury
- ALA. *See* α -linolenic acid
- alimentary tract, congenital anomalies of, 182
- monitoring and evaluation, 188
- nutrition-related medical management, 187–188
- nutrition therapy, 183, 183*b*–186*b*, 186–187
- alkaline phosphatase (ALP), 48, 219, 254, 276*b*
- ALP. *See* alkaline phosphatase
- α -linolenic acid (ALA), 43, 45, 106
- altered growth, and neurological disorders, 215–216
- aluminum toxicity, and parenteral nutrition, 56–57
- Ameda Deluxe Penguin Nutritional Breast Milk Warmer, 70
- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), 240, 282, 293, 322
- American College of Medical Genetics, 225
- American Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition, 43, 57, 61, 136*b*
- amino acid-based formulas, 74, 149, 191, 296, 302*b*, 334*t*
- amino acids (AA), 39–40, 46, 54, 57, 228, 243, 251
- anemia, 286*b*
- associated necrotizing enterocolitis, 140
- of chronic kidney disease, 207
- anorexia, 204
- anthropometric assessment, 5–6, 216
- body proportionality, 10–11
- growth charts, 12, 13*f*–14*f*, 15*t*
- head circumference, 9–10
- length, 8
- regional anthropometry, 11
- weight, 6–8, 9*b*
- antibiotics, 155*b*, 219, 254
- anticonvulsants, 219
- antiepileptic drugs, 215, 219
- anuria, 199, 203–204
- Apgar scores, 19
- apnea, 22*b*, 112
- apple juice, 218, 288
- appropriate for gestational age (AGA) infants, 5*b*
- ARA. *See* arachidonic acid
- arachidonic acid (ARA), 43, 45

- Baby's First test, 225
bedside milk warmers, 69
bicarbonate, 164*t*, 204
bile acid sequestrants, 155*b*
biochemical assessment, 12
 enteral nutrition, 17, 17*b*
 limitations of, 17–18
 normal laboratory values for term/
 preterm infants, 18*b*
 parenteral nutrition, 12, 15, 16*b*
birth weight (BW), 6. *See also* weight
and initiation of parenteral nutrition,
35*b*
 newborn classification of, 4–5, 5*b*
 SGA for late preterm infants, 269*t*
blenderized tube feedings, 216–217
blood gas, 42*b*
blood glucose, 41, 41*b*, 42*b*, 55, 59,
232–233
blood in stool, 23*b*
BMI. *See* body mass index
body composition, 11, 28, 281
body mass index (BMI), 10, 28
body proportionality, 10–11
bolus gastric feeding, 80*b*, 304
 for infants with SBS/IF, 150
 and NEC, 137*b*
bone mineralization, 47, 252, 253
bottles, 88, 89
bovine milk-based fortifiers, 72, 136*b*
bowel, 145
 adaptation, 154
 lengthening procedures, 154
 resection, 139
boys, preterm growth charts for, 14*f*
BPD. *See* bronchopulmonary dysplasia
bradycardia, 22*b*
brain injury, 214, 215
breastfeeding, 68. *See also* human milk
and cleft lip/palate, 214
 conditions compatible with, 69*b*
 conditions incompatible with, 69*b*
 at discharge, 290–291, 292*b*–293*b*,
 293–294, 295*t*
 of infants with cardiovascular
 disorders, 125
 of infants with NAS/NOW, 257, 259,
 259*b*
 jaundice, 169–170, 172*b*–173*b*
 of late preterm infants, 271, 273, 277
 nutrition goals at discharge, 291
 breast milk jaundice, 169, 170, 173*b*
 bronchopulmonary dysplasia (BPD),
 101*b*, 103, 104, 105, 108, 109, 110,
 114, 115
 buprenorphine, 257, 261*b*
 BW. *See* birth weight
 caffeine, 112
 calcitriol, 207, 245
 calcium, 38*t*, 199, 200, 219, 276*b*
 in enteral nutrition, 162*b*
 hypercalcemia, 239, 239*b*–240*b*,
 244–246, 247
 hypocalcemia, 237, 237*b*–238*b*, 244,
 244*b*, 245, 246
 for infants with MBD, 252, 253
 for infants with renal disease, 206
 for late preterm infants, 272*t*
 in parenteral nutrition, 47–48, 57, 251
 serum, 254
 for treatment of respiratory disease,
 106–107
 calcium carbonate, 202, 203
 calcium citrate, 203
 calcium gluconate, 47, 203, 244, 244*b*
 calcium/phosphorus ratio, 39*t*
 carbohydrates, 92, 150, 205
 -modified infant formulas, 331–332*t*
 parenteral nutrition guidelines for,
 38*t*
 cardiovascular disorders, 121
 chylothorax, 121
 common nutrition-related issues, 127
 congenital heart anomalies, 123*f*
 discharge considerations, 128
 monitoring and evaluation, 128
 nutrient requirements, 126–127
 nutrition-related medical
 management, 127–128
 postoperative nutrition, 125–126
 preoperative nutrition, 122, 124–125
 preventive nutrition, 122
 referrals, 128
 treatment nutrition, 122, 124–126
 caregivers
 discharge feeding plan, 274
 education of, 114, 220, 275
 readiness of, 275
 carnitine in parenteral nutrition, 54
 carob bean gum, 193*t*
 casein hydrolysate formula, 191

- catch-up growth, 285
CDH. *See* congenital diaphragmatic hernia
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, growth charts of, 216
central parenteral nutrition, 58*b*
central venous catheters, 58*b*
cereals, 89*t*, 191–192, 193*t*
cerebral palsy, 216
ceruloplasmin, 52
CHD. *See* congenital heart disease
CHF. *See* congestive heart failure
chloride, 38*t*, 46–47, 164*t*
chloride/acetate ratio, 38*t*, 46–47
chlorothiazide diuretics, 112
cholecalciferol, 203, 244*b*, 274
cholestyramine, 155*b*
choline in parenteral nutrition, 54
chromium
 excretion, and renal dysfunction, 206
 in parenteral nutrition, 50, 51*t*, 158*b*
chronic kidney disease (CKD), 198, 200, 204
 classification, 209
 dialysis, 207
 discharge considerations, 210
 treatment nutrition, 202, 203, 205, 206, 207
chronic lung disease, 101*b*
chylothorax, 102*b*, 105, 108, 121
 enteral nutrition, 126
 monitoring and evaluation, 128
 nutrition-related issues, 127
 nutrition-related medical management, 128
 parenteral nutrition, 124, 125
 prevention of, 122
CKD. *See* chronic kidney disease
cleft lip/palate, 214
clinical assessment, 18–19
 Apgar scores, 19
 feeding tolerance, 21
 medical records, 21, 24
 skin, 19, 20*b*–21*b*
 urine/stool output, 21, 22*b*–23*b*
 vital signs, 21, 22*b*
clonidine, 261*b*
colostrum, 136*b*, 149, 241
composite intravenous fat emulsions, 147–148, 156*b*
conditionally essential nutrients, 224
congenital diaphragmatic hernia (CDH), 102*b*, 108, 109, 114, 115–116, 188
congenital heart disease (CHD), 121, 123*f*, 126
congestive heart failure (CHF), 122
conjugated hyperbilirubinemia. *See* neonatal cholestasis
constipation, 218, 287–288
continuous gastric feeding, 80*b*–81*b*, 304
 for infants with SBS/IF, 150
 and NEC, 137*b*
continuous positive airway pressure ventilation (CPAP), 109, 110
conversion tables
 atomic weights and valences, 311–312, 311*t*
 conversions of kcal/oz and kcal/mL, 325*t*
 electrolytes and minerals, 312*t*–313*t*
 nutrient content per mL of solution, 316*t*–317*t*
 nutrient content per gram of compound, 315*t*–316*t*
 vitamins, 313*t*–314*t*
copper
 for neonatal cholestasis, 177*b*
 in parenteral nutrition, 50, 51*t*, 52, 158*b*
corrected gestational age, 281–282
corticosteroids, 112, 219
cow's milk protein allergy, 191
 -based infant formulas, 327*t*, 330*t*, 335*t*
 -based post-discharge infant formulas, 328*t*
CPAP. *See* continuous positive airway pressure ventilation
C-reactive protein (CRP), 127, 186
crown-heel length, 8
CRP. *See* C-reactive protein
cue-based feeding, 84, 110
cyclic parenteral nutrition, 59–60, 60*b*, 147, 157*b*
cysteine, 54, 251
dextrose, 40–41, 43, 57, 229
 energy calculation from, 320
 gel, 241–242, 245
 infusion, 243*b*

- restriction, 55
- DHA. *See* docosahexaenoic acid
- DHM. *See* donor human milk
- diabetes, infants of mothers with, 233, 242–243
- dialysis, 204, 205–206, 207–208
- dietary fiber, 152
- dietary intake assessment
 data analysis, 24–25
 data collection, 24
- dihydrotachysterol, 203
- discharge and follow-up, 281
 breastfeeding, 290–294
 discharge criteria, 282–283
 feeding progression, 303–305
 feeding tolerance, 286–288
 formula choices, 296–299, 297*t*, 298*b*
 growth assessment, 283–285
 human milk, 290–294, 300*b*–301*b*
 intake assessment, 288–289
 laboratory and physiological assessment, 286, 286*b*
 nutrient intake recommendations, 290*b*
 nutrition assessment, 283–289
 risk factors for increased nutrition requirements, 289*b*
 supplements, 299, 300*b*–302*b*, 302–303
- disease-specific infant formulas, 335*t*
- diuretics, 127, 219
 chlorothiazide, 112
 loop, 112, 208, 245
 and MBD, 254
 for respiratory diseases, 112–113
- docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), 43, 45, 104
- donor human milk (DHM), 71–72, 73*b*, 134*b*, 149, 241, 271
- Down syndrome, 216
- dysbiosis, 153
- dysphagia, and neurological disorders, 216–217
- EA. *See* enteral autonomy
- early-onset hypocalcemia, 238*b*
- ECMO. *See* extracorporeal membrane oxygenation
- EFAD. *See* essential fatty acid deficiency
- EFAs. *See* essential fatty acids
- EHM. *See* expressed human milk
- ELBW. *See* extremely low-birth-weight infants
- electrolytes, 42*b*, 197, 199, 214. *See also* fluids
 conversion table, 312*t*–313*t*
 gastrointestinal electrolyte losses, 164*t*
 imbalance, monitoring, 208
 imbalance, parenteral nutrition during, 35–36
 for infants with renal disease, 203–204
 in parenteral nutrition, 45, 46–47
 parenteral nutrition guidelines for, 38*t*–39*t*
 for prevention of respiratory disease, 103–104
 replacement, for respiratory diseases, 113
 supplements, 114
 for treatment of respiratory disease, 105, 106*b*
- EN. *See* enteral nutrition
- endocrine disorders
 hypercalcemia, 239, 239*b*–240*b*
 hyperglycemia, 236, 236*t*
 hypocalcemia, 237, 237*b*–238*b*
 hypoglycemia, 232–233, 233*t*, 234*t*–235*t*
 monitoring and evaluation, 246–247
 nutrition-related medical management, 245–246
 nutrition therapy, 240–245, 242*f*, 243*b*, 244*b*
- end-stage liver disease, 174
- enemas, 218
- energy, 43, 251
 adequate intakes, 289
- enteral requirements for VLBW infants, 76*t*
 for infants with renal disease, 204–205
 for late preterm infants, 272*t*
 needs, of infants with neurologic disorders, 215
 needs, of infants with respiratory diseases, 108
 for neonatal cholestasis, 174*b*
 parenteral nutrition guidelines for, 38*t*
 for prevention of respiratory disease, 103
 recommended intake, 29*t*

- requirements, for infants with CHD, 126
- total, calculation of, 320–321, 324–325
- Enfamil AR, 193*t*
- Enfaport, 126
- enteral autonomy (EA), 144
 - and age, 144
 - and diagnosis, 144
 - and length/region/function of remaining bowel, 145
- enteral fasting, and NEC, 136*b*
- enteral multivitamin products, 338*t*
- enteral nutrition (EN), 17, 68
 - after alimentary tract surgery, 184*b*–185*b*, 187
 - feeding initiation and advancement, 83–86
 - feeding methodology, 79, 80*b*–83*b*
 - feeding times, 83
 - fortification of human milk, 72, 74
 - human milk, 68–72
 - hypercaloric feedings, 90–92
 - infant formulas, 74
 - for infants with cardiovascular disorders, 124, 125–126
 - for infants with chylothorax, 105
 - for infants with hypoglycemia, 241
 - for infants with IMDs, 227–228
 - for infants with NEC, 133, 137–139
 - for infants with neurological disorders, 214, 219–220
 - for infants with renal disease, 200, 201*t*, 202–203
 - for infants with respiratory disease, 110, 111, 116
 - for infants with SBS/IF, 149–150, 157, 161*b*–163*b*
 - intake assessment, 288
 - for late preterm infants, 271, 273–274
 - minimal, 83, 124, 125, 126, 136*b*, 185*b*
 - monitoring, 17*b*
 - nipples and bottles, 89
 - parenteral nutrition during transition to, 36
 - patient safety, 79
 - potential renal solute load and osmolality, 92
 - for prevention of MBD, 252, 252*t*
 - for prevention of respiratory disease, 105
 - probiotics, 90
 - providing adequate nutrition in a limited fluid volume, 107*b*
 - recommended energy and protein intakes, 29*t*
 - requirements, 74–75, 76*t*–78*t*, 79
 - thickened liquids, 86, 88, 89*b*
 - timing of reinitiation of, 133, 137
 - total energy, calculation of, 324–325
 - total fluid, calculation of, 324
 - total protein, calculation of, 325
 - transition to oral feeding, 84, 86, 304
 - volume for reinitiation of, 137
- enzyme replacement therapy, 229
- esophagitis, 192
- ESPGHAN. *See* European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology Hepatology and Nutrition
- essential fatty acid deficiency (EFAD), 126, 127, 128, 148, 156*b*
- essential fatty acids (EFAs), 43, 322, 324
- EUGR. *See* extrauterine growth restriction
- Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 282
- European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN), 135, 219
- expressed human milk (EHM), 72, 83, 125, 134, 149, 227, 291, 294, 345
- extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO), 105, 108, 111, 115
- extrauterine growth restriction (EUGR), 4–5, 5*b*, 284–285
- extremely low-birth-weight (ELBW) infants, 5*b*, 104, 109, 284
- fat, 205. *See also* intravenous fat emulsions (IVFEs)
- energy calculation from, 320
- for neonatal cholestasis, 175*b*
- soluble vitamins, 126, 161*b*, 174, 175*b*–177*b*
- FDA. *See* US Food and Drug Administration
- feeding. *See also* necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC); oral feeding
- assessment, 271
- constipation, 287–288
- cue-based, 84, 110

- delayed feeding skills, and
 neurological disorders, 216–217
 difficulties, in late preterm infants,
 268*b*
 discharge feeding plan, 230, 274, 276
 gavage, 241
 methodology, for GERD, 190
 poor, 288
 problematic behaviors, 303
 problems, and respiratory disease,
 109–110
 progression, 303–305
 protocol, and NEC, 135*b*
 reflux, 287
 feeding, enteral. *See also* enteral nutrition
 (EN)
 advancement, and NEC, 136*b*–137*b*,
 138
 composition, 138, 149–150
 gastric residuals, 84–86
 hypercaloric feedings, 90–92
 initiation/advancement, 83–86
 methodology, 79, 80*b*–83*b*
 modalities, 221*b*–222*b*
 nipples and bottles, 89
 nonstandard infant feeding recipes,
 341–346, 347*t*
 route of administration, 150
 sample plan, 85*b*
 schedule, 150
 thickened liquids, 86, 88, 89*b*
 times, 83
 transition to oral feeding from, 84,
 86, 304
 feeding intolerance, 84, 139, 267
 protein- or carbohydrate-modified
 formulas for infants with
 symptoms of, 331*t*–332*t*
 and SBS/IF, 151–152
 feeding therapist, 214, 216, 243, 288
 feeding tolerance, 21, 109, 124, 286–288
 Fenton growth chart, 15*t*, 28, 269*t*, 284*b*
 ferrous sulfate, 275
 fetal alcohol syndrome, 213
 fetal growth restriction. *See* intrauterine
 growth restriction (IUGR)
 fiber, dietary, 152
 fiberoptic endoscopic evaluation of
 swallow study, 87*b*–88*b*
 Finnegan Neonatal Abstinence Scoring
 Tool, 260
 fish oil (FO), 45, 153
 fish oil-intravenous fat emulsions (FO-
 IVFEs), 147–149, 156*b*
 fluids, 36–37, 197, 199, 214. *See also*
 electrolytes
 enteral requirements for VLBW
 infants, 76*t*
 imbalance, parenteral nutrition
 during, 35–36
 for infants with IMDs, 229
 for infants with renal disease,
 203–204
 for prevention of respiratory disease,
 103–104
 requirements, for preterm/term
 infants, 37
 strategies for providing adequate
 nutrition in a limited fluid volume,
 107*b*
 total, calculation of, 319, 324
 for treatment of respiratory disease,
 105, 106*b*
 fluoride
 in enteral nutrition, 75
 supplementation, at discharge,
 302–303
 FO. *See* fish oil
 FO-IVFEs. *See* fish oil-based intravenous
 fat emulsions
 folic acid, 207
 fortification of human milk, 36, 71, 72,
 74, 126, 136*b*, 291, 293, 294
 fundoplication, 194
 furosemide, 208, 245

 GA. *See* gestational age
 gastric emptying, 145, 151, 190, 200, 218
 gastric residuals (GR), 84–86
 gastroesophageal reflux, 189, 287
 gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD),
 109, 115, 189–190
 cow's milk protein allergy, 191
 diagnosis of, 190
 feeding methodology, 190
 monitoring and evaluation, 194
 nutrition-related medical
 management, 192, 194
 positioning, 190–191
 symptoms of, 189
 thickened feedings, 191–192, 193*t*
 gastrointestinal tract

- mucosal integrity, 130
- sites of secretion, absorption, and care implications, 146*f*
- gastrostomy and jejunostomy (GJ) tube, 221*b*–22*b*
- gastrostomy tube (GT), 82*b*, 150, 194, 210, 221*b*, 304
- gavage feedings, 241
- Gelmix, 89*t*, 193*t*
- gene therapy, 229
- Genetic Metabolic Dietitians International (GMDI), 227
- Gerber Good Start Gentle, 200, 201*t*
- GERD. *See* gastroesophageal reflux disease
- gestational age (GA), 4–5, 5*b*
- GIR. *See* glucose infusion rate
- girls, preterm growth charts for, 13*f*
- GJ. *See* gastrostomy and jejunostomy tube
- glucagon-like peptide analogs, 155*b*
- glucose, 125
 - blood, 41, 41*b*, 42*b*, 55, 59, 232–233
 - imbalance, parenteral nutrition during, 35–36
 - plasma glucose thresholds for hypoglycemia, 232–233, 233*t*
- glucose infusion rate (GIR), 38*t*, 40–41, 41*b*, 59, 228, 243, 321
- GMDI. *See* Genetic Metabolic Dietitians International
- GR. *See* gastric residuals
- green beans, fiber from, 152
- growth. *See also* anthropometric assessment
 - altered, and neurological disorders, 215–216
 - assessment, after discharge, 283–285
 - catch-up, 285
 - goals, 283
 - velocity of weight and length gain after term-corrected age, 285*t*
- growth charts, 12, 219, 283, 284*b*
 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 216
 - comparisons, 15*t*
 - condition-specific, 216, 217*b*
 - Fenton, 15*t*, 28, 269*t*, 284*b*
 - Olsen, 15*t*, 269*t*, 284*b*
 - preterm growth charts for boys, 14*f*
 - preterm growth charts for girls, 13*f*
 - types of, 12
 - Villar, 15*t*
 - WHO, 10, 15*t*, 28, 216
- growth velocity (GV) model, 6, 7
- GT. *See* gastrostomy tube
- gut microbiota, 215
- GV. *See* growth velocity model
- H2 blockers, 155*b*
- HC. *See* head circumference
- head circumference (HC), 9–10, 28, 259, 284
- heart rate, assessment of, 22*b*
- hemodialysis, 206
- heparin in parenteral nutrition, 55
- histamine-2 receptor antagonists, for GERD, 192
- HLHS. *See* hypoplastic left heart syndrome
- HMFs. *See* human milk fortifiers
- home parenteral nutrition, 60
- human milk, 68, 105, 109, 114, 241, 329*f*, 336*t*. *See also* breastfeeding analyzers, 74
 - bar code scanning systems, 71
 - benefits, for infants with NAS/NOW, 257, 259, 259*b*
 - composition of, 71
 - conditions compatible with using, 69*b*
 - conditions incompatible with using, 69*b*
 - at discharge, 290–291, 292*b*–293*b*, 293–294, 295*t*, 300*b*–301*b*
 - donor human milk, 71–72, 73*b*, 134*b*, 149, 241, 271
 - expressed, 72, 83, 125, 134, 149, 227, 291, 294, 345
 - fortification of, 36, 71, 72, 74, 126, 136*b*, 291, 293, 294
 - for infants with chylothorax, 126
 - for infants with congenital anomalies of alimentary tract, 182, 187–188
 - for infants with renal disease, 200, 201*t*, 202
 - for infants with SBS/IF, 149
 - labeling of, 70–71
 - for late preterm infants, 271, 273*t* and NEC, 134*b*
 - nonstandard infant feeding recipes using, 345–346
 - sharing, 72

- skimmed, 126
- storage of, 69–70, 70*t*
- Human Milk Banking Association of North America, 72, 73*b*
- human milk fortifiers (HMFs), 72, 91, 125, 252, 254, 291, 293, 294, 329*f*, 336*r*–337*r*
- multinutrient, 139, 253
- and NEC, 136*b*
- reinitiation of, 138–139
- hunger provocation, 304
- hydrolyzed cow's milk formula, 191
- hydrops fetalis, 102*b*
- 3-hydroxy-3-methylglutaric aciduria, 226
- 25-hydroxyvitamin D, 176*b*–177*b*, 203, 219, 253, 276*b*
- hyperbilirubinemia, 169–170, 268*b*
- monitoring and evaluation, 179
- neonatal cholestasis, 169–170
- nutrition-related medical management, 178
- nutrition therapy, 170, 172*b*–173*b*, 173–174, 174*b*–178*t*
- unconjugated, 169
- hypercalcemia, 239, 239*b*–240*b*, 252
- monitoring and evaluation, 247
- nutrition-related medical management, 245–246
- nutrition therapy, 244–245
- hypercaloric feedings, 90–91
- preparation of, 91
- safety issues, 91–92
- hyperglycemia, 55, 236, 236*t*
- monitoring and evaluation, 246
- nutrition-related medical management, 245
- nutrition therapy for, 243, 243*b*
- hyperkalemia, 200, 202, 208, 210
- hyperphosphatemia, 202, 210
- hyperthermia, 22*b*
- hypoallergenic formulas, 191, 333*t*
- hypocalcemia, 203, 237, 237*b*–238*b*
- monitoring and evaluation, 246
- nutrition-related medical management, 245
- nutrition therapy, 244, 244*b*
- hypoglycemia, 232–233, 268*b*
- causes of, 234*b*–235*b*
- monitoring and evaluation, 246
- nutrition-related medical management, 245
- nutrition therapy for, 240–243, 242*f*
- plasma glucose thresholds for, 232–233, 233*t*
- risk factors for, 234*b*
- screening and management of postnatal glucose levels, 241*f*
- symptoms of, 235*b*–236*b*
- hyponatremia, 204
- hypophosphatemia, 202, 252
- hypoplastic left heart syndrome (HLHS), 123*f*
- hypoplastic lung conditions, 102*b*
- hypothermia, 22*b*
- hypotonia, 219
- ibuprofen, 128
- ICV. *See* ileocecal valve
- IF. *See* intestinal failure
- IFALD. *See* intestinal failure-associated liver disease
- ileal resection, 145
- ileocecal valve (ICV), 145
- IMDs. *See* inherited metabolic disorders
- inborn errors of metabolism. *See* inherited metabolic disorders (IMDs)
- indirect calorimetry, 108
- individualized growth trajectory, 7–8
- indomethacin, 128
- infant formulas, 74, 105–106, 255
- amino acid-based, 74, 149, 191, 296, 302*b*, 334*t*
- at discharge, 296–299, 297*t*, 298*b*, 300*b*, 301*b*–302*b*
- disease-specific, 335*t*
- and GERD, 191
- hypoallergenic, 191, 333*t*
- for infants with chylothorax, 126
- for infants with hypoglycemia, 241
- for infants with NAS/NOW, 259
- for infants with renal disease, 200, 201*t*, 202
- for late preterm infants, 271
- preparation of, 297, 299
- preterm, 75, 271, 294, 330*t*
- preterm transitional infant formulas, 328*t*
- rice starch, 193*t*, 220
- soy-based, 74, 200, 296, 302*b*
- specialty, 226–227, 331*t*–332*t*

- standard, 327*t*
- thickening of, 191–192
- infant length board, 8
- inhaled corticosteroids, 112
- inherited metabolic disorders (IMDs), 224–226
 - discharge considerations, 230
 - identification of, 224–225
 - incidence of, 225–226
 - monitoring and evaluation, 229–230
 - normal and impaired metabolic pathways, 225*f*
 - nutrition-related medical management, 229
 - nutrition requirements, 228
 - treatment nutrition, 226–228
- in-line filters, 59
- insulin, 55, 229, 245
- intake assessment, 24–25, 288–289
- Integrity Compounding Pharmacy, 228
- interdisciplinary team, 219, 220
- International Standardization Organization, 79
- intestinal atresia, 144
- intestinal failure (IF), 143. *See also* short bowel syndrome (SBS)
 - feeding intolerance, 151–152
 - gastrointestinal electrolyte losses, 164*t*
 - intake and output, 157, 160, 163–164
 - medications for, 154, 155*b*
 - monitoring of enteral nutrition, 157, 161*b*–163*b*
 - monitoring of parenteral nutrition, 154–155, 156*b*–157*b*, 157, 158*b*–160*b*
 - mucous fistula refeeding, 153–154
 - nutritional management, 152–153
 - preventive nutrition, 145
 - surgery for, 155
 - treatment nutrition, 145, 147–150
- intestinal failure-associated liver disease (IFALD), 148, 149, 153, 155
- intestinal rehabilitation centers, 160
- intrauterine growth restriction (IUGR), 5*b*
- intravenous fat emulsions (IVFEs), 43, 44*b*, 45, 57, 124, 228, 322
 - composite, 147–148, 156*b*
 - composition of, 323*t*
 - fish oil, 147–149, 156*b*
 - soy-based, 147, 156*b*
- iodine, 52, 158*b*–159*b*, 206
- iron, 218
 - in enteral nutrition, 75, 161*b*
 - infant formulas with, 301*b*–302*b*
 - for late preterm infants, 272*t*, 274–275
 - in parenteral nutrition, 53
 - supplementation, at discharge, 302
- IUGR. *See* intrauterine growth restriction
- IVFEs. *See* intravenous fat emulsions
- jaundice, breastfeeding, 169–170, 172*b*–173*b*
- jejunal feeding, 194
- jejunal resection, 145
- jejunal tube, 82*b*–83*b*
- jejunostomy tube (JT), 221*b*–222*b*
- The Joint Commission, 79
- JT. *See* jejunostomy tube
- KDIGO. *See* Kidney Disease: Improving Global Outcome classification
- KDOQI. *See* Kidney Disease Outcomes Quality Initiative nutrition guidelines
- Keriton, 71
- kidney development, 196–197. *See also* renal function
- Kidney Disease: Improving Global Outcome (KDIGO) classification, 208–209, 209*b*
- Kidney Disease Outcomes Quality Initiative (KDOQI) nutrition guidelines, 200
- LA. *See* linoleic acid
- labeling of human milk, 70–71
- laboratory tests. *See* biochemical assessment
- lactation consultant, 214, 246
- large for gestational age (LGA) infants, 4, 5*b*, 233
- late-onset hypocalcemia, 238*b*
- late preterm infants (LPIs), 5*b*, 265–267
 - bone health of, 274, 276*b*
 - caregiver readiness and education, 275
 - common nutrition-related issues, 277–278
 - discharge preparation and outpatient follow-up, 276–277
 - feeding options to meet 120 kcal/kg/d

- intake, 273_t
- future research, 278
- hypoglycemia in, 240, 241_f
- monitoring and evaluation, 275–276
- nutrition recommendations for, 272_t
- nutrition-related medical management, 274–275
- nutrition requirements, 274
- preventive nutrition for, 267–268
- PTDF for, 296
- risk factors for LPI birth, 267
- risk of breastfeeding jaundice, 169–170
- risks associated with, 266–267, 268_b
- SGA weights, 269_t
- treatment nutrition for, 269–274
- weight-gain goals for, 277–278
- laxatives, 218, 219
- LBW. *See* low-birth-weight infants
- L-carnitine, 139
- LCTs. *See* long-chain triglycerides
- left-side positioning, and GERD, 190
- length, 8, 259
 - gain, 283–284, 285_t
 - weight-for-length, 10
- length board, 8
- LGA. *See* large for gestational age infants
- limb circumferences, measurement of, 11
- line filters, 59
- linoleic acid (LA), 43, 45, 127, 322
- lipids
 - clearance, 43, 45
 - enteral supplementation, for SBS/IF, 153
 - infusion rate, calculation of, 322
 - management, 147–149, 156_b–157_b
 - for prevention of respiratory disease, 104
 - for treatment of respiratory disease, 105–106
- liquid fortifiers, 336_t–337_t
- liquid fruit pectin, 152
- liver function tests, 42_b
- long-chain fat supplementation, 153
- long-chain triglycerides (LCTs), 124, 127, 128, 149
- loop diuretics, 112, 208, 245
- loperamide, 155_b
- low-birth-weight (LBW) infants, 5_b
 - gain in crown-heel length in, 8
 - gain in head circumference in, 9
 - intact cow's milk protein-based infant formula for, 330_t
 - minimal enteral nutrition for, 83
 - respiratory disease in, 104
- LPIs. *See* late preterm infants
- macronutrients, 205, 216, 319
 - enteral requirements for VLBW infants, 76_t
 - in human milk, 71
 - for neonatal cholestasis, 174_b–175_b
 - parenteral, monitoring of, 154, 156_b–157_b
- magnesium, 39_t
 - in enteral nutrition, 162_b
 - in parenteral nutrition, 48
 - serum, 244, 244_b
- magnesium sulfate, 244_b
- malnutrition, 25, 26_t–27_t, 28, 200
- manganese
 - for neonatal cholestasis, 177_b
 - in parenteral nutrition, 51_t, 52, 159_b
- maple syrup urine disease, 228
- March of Dimes, 277
- MBD. *See* metabolic bone disease of prematurity
- MCAD. *See* medium-chain acyl-CoA dehydrogenase deficiency
- MCTs. *See* medium-chain triglycerides
- mechanical ventilation, 109, 115
- meconium aspiration syndrome, 101_b
- Medela Waterless Milk Warmer, 70
- medical records, 21, 24
- medium-chain acyl-CoA dehydrogenase deficiency (MCAD), 226
- medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs), 105, 124, 153, 333_t, 334_t
- Medolac, 73_b
- MEN. *See* minimal enteral nutrition
- metabolic bone disease (MBD) of prematurity, 249–250, 286_b
 - diagnostic criteria for, 249–250
 - discharge considerations, 254
 - drug-nutrient interactions, 254
 - incidence of, 249
- medications and medical interventions, 253
- monitoring and evaluation, 254
- preventive nutrition, 251–252, 251_t,

- 252_t
- risk factors for, 250_b
- treatment nutrition, 252–253
- MetabolicPro, 227
- metabolic team, 229, 230
- methadone, 257, 261_b
- microbiome-gut-brain axis, 215
- micronutrients, 216, 219, 226, 300_b–302_b
 - enteral, monitoring of, 157, 161_b–163_b
 - parenteral, monitoring of, 155, 157, 158_b–160_b
- mineral oil, 218
- minerals, 42_b, 191, 251
 - conversion table, 312_t–313_t
 - enteral requirements for VLBW infants, 77_t
 - for infants with renal disease, 206
 - for neonatal cholestasis, 177_b–178_b
 - parenteral nutrition guidelines for, 38_t–39_t
 - products, 340_t
 - supplements, at discharge, 299, 300_b–302_b
- minimal enteral nutrition (MEN), 83, 124, 125, 126, 136_b, 185_b
- modified barium swallow study, 214, 216
- morphine, 260, 261, 261_b
- mucous fistula refeeding, 153–154
- multidisciplinary team, 19, 61, 145, 163, 188, 274, 275, 283
- multivitamins, 275
 - enteral multivitamin products, 338_t
 - parenteral multivitamin solutions, 48
- NAS/NOW. *See* neonatal abstinence syndrome/neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome
- nasoduodenal/nasojunal tube, 81_b
- nasogastric tube (NGT), 80_b–81_b, 125, 128, 150, 210, 221_b, 271, 273–274
- NBS. *See* newborn screening
- NEC. *See* necrotizing enterocolitis
- necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), 130–132, 202, 270
 - advancement of feeding volume, 138
 - commonly used medications/medical interventions, 140
 - common nutrition-related issues, 139
 - discharge considerations, 140
 - and enteral autonomy, 144
 - feeding composition, 138
 - and gastric residuals, 84
 - and human milk, 71, 72
 - incidence of, 130
 - and MEN, 124
 - modified Bell's staging, 131–132, 132_b
 - and NICU feeding practices, 136_b–137_b
 - parenteral nutrition, 133, 139
 - pathophysiology of, 131_f
 - postsurgical considerations, 139
 - preventive nutrition, 133, 134_b–135_b
 - and probiotics, 90, 135_b
 - rate of feeding advancement, 138
 - reinitiation of human milk fortifier, 138–139
 - symptoms of, 130–131
 - timing of reinitiation of enteral feedings, 133, 137
 - treatment nutrition, 133, 137–139
 - volume of reinitiation of enteral feedings, 137
- neonatal abstinence syndrome/neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome (NAS/NOW), 256–257
 - discharge considerations, 261–262
 - incidence of, 257
 - nonpharmacologic management, 260–261
 - nutrition requirements, 259
 - pharmacologic management, 260, 261_b
 - postnatal growth outcomes, 260_b
 - preventive nutrition, 257
 - symptoms and etiology of, 258_b
 - treatment nutrition, 257, 259
- neonatal cholestasis, 170
 - etiologies of, 171_b–172_b
 - monitoring and evaluation, 179
 - nutrition-related medical management, 178
 - nutrition therapy, 173–174, 174_b–178_t
- Neonatal Research Network (*Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development), 282
- nephrocalcinosis, 198, 207
 - classification, 209
 - preventive nutrition, 199
- nephrogenesis, 196
- neural tube defects, 216

- neurological disorders
 altered growth, 215–216
 causes of neurological impairment, 212–213
 common nutrition-related issues, 215–218
 condition-specific growth charts, 216, 217*b*
 delayed feeding skills and dysphagia, 216–217
 discharge considerations, 219–220
 and gastrointestinal issues, 218
 incidence of, 213
 monitoring and evaluation, 219–220
 nutrition-related medical management, 218–219
 nutrition requirements, 215
 preventive nutrition, 213
 treatment nutrition, 214
- New Ballard score, 4
- newborn screening (NBS), 224–225
- NGT. *See* nasogastric tube
- nipples, 88, 89
- Ni-Q, 73*b*
- NNS. *See* nonnutritive sucking
- nonnutritive sucking (NNS), 110, 125, 150
- nonstandard infant feeding recipes
 powdered formula recipe calculation, 342–344
 selection of formula information, 347*t*
 using human milk and powdered formula, 345–346
 validity, checking, 344–345
- normal birth weight, 5*b*
- North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition, 143, 144
- Norwood procedure, 125
- nutrient intake. *See also* intake assessment
 calculation, 25*b*
 recommended energy and protein intakes, 29*t*
- nutrition assessment, 1, 4
 anthropometric assessment, 5–12
 biochemical assessment, 12, 15–18
 clinical assessment, 18–24
 dietary intake assessment, 24–25
 after discharge, 283–289
 malnutrition, identification of, 25, 26*t*–27*t*, 28
- newborn classification of gestational age and birth weight, 4–5, 5*b*
 screening, 1, 2*b*, 3*f*, 4
- nutrition-focused physical assessment, 19, 28, 219
- nutrition products, neonatal intensive care unit, 326, 327*t*–340*t*
- nutrition screening, 1
 criteria, 2*b*
 tool, 3*f*, 4
- oatmeal cereal, 193*t*
- occipital frontal circumference. *See* head circumference (HC)
- occupational therapist, 110, 116, 218, 246
- octreotide, 155*b*
- OGT. *See* orogastric tube
- Ohio Neonatal Nutritionists
 Screening Criteria for Identifying Hospitalized Infants at Highest Nutritional Risk, 2*b*
- oliguria, 199, 203–204
- Olsen growth chart, 15*t*, 269*t*, 284*b*
- omega-6 fatty acids, 147
- Omegaven, 148, 320
- opioid-substitution therapy, 257
- oral feeding
 for infants with cardiovascular disorders, 125
 for infants with IMDs, 227–228
 for infants with SBS/IF, 150
 swallow function, assessment of, 87*b*–88*b*
 transition from enteral feeding to, 84, 86, 304
- orogastric tube (OGT), 80*b*–81*b*, 150, 221*b*
- oropharyngeal colostrum
 administration, 136*b*, 149
- osmolality, 72, 88, 92, 139
- osmolarity, 41, 57
- osteopenia of prematurity, 276*b*
- ostomy, 139, 160
- parental education, 190, 277
- parenteral nutrition (PN), 12, 15, 33
 access for, 57, 58*b*
 after alimentary tract surgery, 186–187
 amino acids, 39–40
 calcium and phosphorus, 47–48

- calculation of calories from essential fatty acids, 322, 324
- carnitine, 54
- choline, 54
- complications and administration
 - issues, 56–61, 56*t*
- cyclic, 59–60, 60*b*, 147, 157*b*
- cysteine, 54
- dextrose, 40–41, 43
- electrolytes, 45, 46–47
- fluids, 36–37
- frequency of laboratory monitoring, 42*b*–43*b*
- glucose infusion rate, calculation of, 321
- guidelines, 37, 38*t*–39*t*
- heparin, 55
- indications for use of, 34*b*
- for infants undergoing therapeutic hypothermia, 214
- for infants with cardiovascular disorders, 124, 125, 128
- for infants with chylothorax, 105
- for infants with IMDs, 228
- for infants with NEC, 133, 139
- for infants with respiratory disease, 104, 105, 108, 111
- for infants with SBS/IF, 147–149, 154–155, 156*b*–157*b*, 157, 158*b*–160*b*
- initiation of, 33, 35*b*
- insulin, 55
- intravenous fat emulsions, 43, 44*b*, 45
- for late preterm infants, 269–270, 270*f*
- lipid infusion rate, calculation of, 322
- lipids, 104
- magnesium, 48
- monitoring, 55
- monitoring schedule, 16*b*
- osmolarity, 57
- during periods of fluid, glucose, and electrolyte imbalance, 35–36
- for prevention of MBD, 251, 251*t*
- providing adequate nutrition in a limited fluid volume, 107*b*
- recommended energy and protein intakes, 29*t*
- starter, 35
- termination of, 36
- total energy, calculation of, 320–321
- total fluid, calculation of, 319
- total protein, calculation of, 319–320
- trace elements, 50, 51*t*, 52–53
- during transition to full enteral feedings, 36
- two-in-one, 318–319
- vitamins, 48, 49*t*, 50
- parenteral nutrition-associated
 - cholestasis (PNAC), 147, 148, 286*b*
- parenteral nutrition-associated liver disease (PNALD), 45, 48, 52, 59, 145, 147, 148
- partially hydrolyzed guar gum, 152
- patent ductus arteriosus (PDA), 122
 - enteral nutrition for infants with, 124
 - nutrition-related issues, 127
 - nutrition-related medical management, 128
 - parenteral nutrition for infants with, 124
- patient safety
 - enteral feeding, 79, 86
 - hypercaloric feedings, 91–92
- PDA. *See* patent ductus arteriosus
- pear juice, 218, 288
- Pediatric Endocrine Society, 240*b*
- Pediatric Nutrition Practice Group, The, 341
- PediTools, 6, 10, 12, 28, 269, 282
- peripherally inserted central venous catheters, 58*b*
- peripheral parenteral nutrition, 57, 58*b*
- peritoneal dialysis, 204, 205–206
- persistent pulmonary hypertension, 102*b*, 108
- pH, stool, 23*b*
- phenobarbital, 261*b*
- phenylketonuria (PKU), 226
- phosphorus, 39*t*, 199, 200, 202, 219, 276*b*
 - in enteral nutrition, 162*b*
 - for infants with MBD, 252, 253
 - for infants with renal disease, 206
 - in parenteral nutrition, 47–48, 57, 251
 - serum, 254
 - for treatment of respiratory disease, 106–107
- physical examination, 19, 246, 247
- physical therapist, 218
- phytosterols, 147
- PKU. *See* phenylketonuria
- PN. *See* parenteral nutrition
- PNAC. *See* parenteral nutrition-

- associated cholestasis
- PNALD. *See* parenteral nutrition-associated liver disease
- polyuria, 204
- ponderal index, 10
- poor feeding, 288
- positioning, and GERD, 190–191
- postnatal growth. *See* anthropometric assessment
- postterm infants, 4, 5*b*
- potassium, 164*t*
 - hyperkalemia, 200, 202, 208, 210
 - in parenteral nutrition, 38*t*, 46
 - restriction, 204
- potassium phosphate, 47
- potential renal solute load (PRSL), 92
- powdered formula, nonstandard enteral feeding calculation using, 341–346, 347*t*
- powder fortifiers, 337*t*
- prednisone, 246
- Pregestimil, 126
- premature infants. *See* preterm infants
- preterm discharge formula (PTDF), 294, 296, 297*t*, 300*b*, 301*b*
- preterm growth charts, 13*f*, 14*f*
- preterm infants, 4, 5*b*. *See also* late preterm infants; metabolic bone disease (MBD) of prematurity
 - acute kidney injury in, 198
 - alimentary tract surgery in, 187
 - body proportionality of, 10
 - cardiovascular disorders in, 127
 - chronic kidney disease in, 198
 - corrected gestational age, 281–282
 - definition of, 265
 - enteral nutrition for, 74–75, 252*t*
 - fluid, glucose, and electrolyte imbalance in, 35
 - fluid requirements for, 37*t*
 - functional renal immaturity in, 197
 - GERD in, 190
 - hypoglycemia in, 233*t*, 241–242, 241*f*, 242*f*
 - hypophosphatemia in, 202
 - infant formulas for, 74
 - intact cow's milk protein-based infant formula for, 330*t*
 - and kidney development, 197
 - malnutrition in, 25
 - NEC in, 135*b*, 270
 - nephrocalcinosis in, 198
 - neurodevelopment of, 215
 - normal laboratory values for, 18*b*
 - nutrient intake calculation for, 25*b*
 - parenteral dextrose for, 41
 - parenteral nutrition for, 35, 36, 39, 41, 43, 45, 47, 50, 52, 53
 - physical examination of, 19
 - preterm births, 266*f*
 - probiotics for, 90
 - protein needs of, 126
 - respiratory disease in, 103
 - thickening liquids/formula for, 86
- preterm transitional infant formulas, 328*t*
- probiotics, 90, 135*b*, 153, 215
- product shortages, parenteral nutrition, 61
- prokinetic/gastric promotility agents, 155*b*
- Proclata Bioscience, 73*b*
- prone positioning, and GERD, 190
- protein, 111, 200, 251
 - adequate intakes, 289
 - C-reactive, 127, 186
 - energy calculation from, 320, 325
 - for infants with IMDs, 228
 - for infants with renal disease, 205–206
 - intake, recommended, 29*t*
 - for late preterm infants, 272*t*
 - modified formulas for infants with symptoms of feeding intolerance, 331*t*–332*t*
 - needs, and CHD, 126
 - needs, of infants with respiratory diseases, 108
 - for neonatal cholestasis, 174*b*
 - parenteral nutrition guidelines for, 38*t*
 - for prevention of respiratory disease, 103
 - total, calculation of, 319–320
- protein hydrolysate-based formulas, 74, 297, 302*b*
- proton pump inhibitors, 155*b*
 - for esophagitis, 192
 - for GERD, 192
- PRSL. *See* potential renal solute load
- prune juice, 218
- PTDF. *See* preterm discharge formula

- powder
- pulmonary atresia with intact ventricular septum, 123*f*
- RDS. *See* respiratory distress syndrome
- reflux, 189, 287. *See also* gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)
- regional anthropometry, 11
- regurgitation. *See* reflux
- renal function
 - acute kidney injury, 197–198, 199
 - biochemical laboratory evaluation, 208–209
 - chronic kidney disease, 198
 - dialysis, 207–208
 - discharge considerations, 210
 - drug-nutrient interactions, 208
 - functional renal immaturity, 197
 - kidney development, 196–197
 - nephrocalcinosis, 198, 199
 - nutrition requirements, 203–207
 - preventive nutrition, 199
 - treatment nutrition, 199–200, 201*r*, 202–203
- renal solute load (RSL), 92
- Renastart, 200, 201*r*
- respiratory disease, 100
 - common nutrition-related issues, 109–110
 - discharge instructions, 114
 - extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, 111
 - feeding problems, 109–110
 - medications, 111–113
 - monitoring and evaluation, 113
 - in newborns, 100*b*–102*b*
 - nutrient requirements, 107–109
 - nutrition follow-up, 114–116
 - nutrition-related medical management, 111–113
 - preventive nutrition, 103–107
 - referrals, 116
 - treatment nutrition, 105–107
- respiratory distress syndrome (RDS), 100*b*, 103, 106*b*, 108, 109
- respiratory insufficiency, 106*b*
- respiratory rate, assessment of, 22*b*
- rice cereal, 193*r*
- rice starch formulas, 193*r*, 220
- RSL. *See* renal solute load
- SafeBaby, 71
- SBS. *See* short bowel syndrome
- selenium, 51*t*, 53, 159*b*, 206
- serum creatinine, 208, 209*b*
- sevelamer carbonate, 202
- sevelamer hydrochloride, 202
- SGA. *See* small for gestational age infants
- short bowel syndrome (SBS), 143–144
 - causes of, 143
 - feeding intolerance, 151–152
 - gastrointestinal electrolyte losses, 164*t*
 - incidence of, 144
 - intake and output, 157, 160, 163–164
 - medications for, 154, 155*b*
 - monitoring of enteral nutrition, 157, 161*b*–163*b*
 - monitoring of parenteral nutrition, 154–155, 156*b*–157*b*, 157, 158*b*–160*b*
 - mucous fistula refeeding, 153–154
 - nutritional management, 152–153
 - preventive nutrition, 145
 - surgery for, 155
 - treatment nutrition, 145, 147–150
- Similac for Spit-Up, 193*t*
- Similac PM 60/40, 200, 201*r*
- Simply Thick, 89*t*, 193*t*
- size for age, 4, 5*b*
- skin, assessment of, 19, 20*b*–21*b*
- skinfolds, measurement of, 11
- skin-to-skin contact, 84
- small for gestational age (SGA) infants, 4, 5*b*, 233
- SMOf lipid, 148
- sodium, 38*t*, 164*t*
 - in enteral nutrition, 162*b*
 - in parenteral nutrition, 46
 - restriction, 104
 - urine, 43*b*
- sodium bicarbonate, 204, 229
- sodium chloride, 204
- sodium phosphate, 47, 202
- sodium polystyrene sulfonate, 202
- SO-IVFEs. *See* soy-based intravenous fat emulsions
- soy-based formulas, 74, 200, 296, 302*b*
- soy-based intravenous fat emulsions (SO-IVFEs), 147, 156*b*
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and

- Children (WIC), 262, 277
- specialty infant formulas, 226–227, 331*t*–332*t*
- speech and language pathologist, 110, 116
- spina bifida, 213
- spirinolactone, for respiratory diseases, 112
- starch-based thickeners, 220
- starter parenteral nutrition, 35
- steroids, 112, 219, 254
- stoma closure, 154
- stool, 287
 - analysis, 21, 23*b*
 - assessment of, 160
 - blood in, 23*b*
 - color, 23*b*
 - first, timing of, 23*b*
 - frequency, 23*b*
 - pH, 23*b*
 - reducing substances, 23*b*
- stool softeners, 219
- sudden infant death syndrome, 191
- supine positioning, 191
- swallow function, assessment of, 87*b*–88*b*, 214
- systemic corticosteroids, 112
- tachycardia, 22*b*
- tachypnea, 22*b*
- tandem mass spectrometry, 224
- teduglutide, 155*b*
- temperature
 - assessment of, 22*b*
 - instability, in late preterm infants, 268*b*
- term infants, 4, 5*b*. *See also* preterm infants
 - with CHD, protein needs of, 126
 - fluid requirements for, 37*t*
 - intact/partially hydrolyzed cow's milk protein-based formulas for, 327*t*
 - normal laboratory values for, 18*b*
 - nutrition recommendations for, 272*t*
 - respiratory disease in, 108
- therapeutic hypothermia, 214
- Thick & Easy, 89*t*
- thickened feedings, 191–192, 193*t*, 220
- thickened liquids, 86, 88, 89*b*, 220
- ThickenUp, 89*t*
- Thick It, 89*t*
- Timeless Medical Systems, 71
- trace elements, 42*b*
 - enteral requirements for VLBW infants, 77*t*
 - for infants with renal disease, 206
 - in parenteral nutrition, 50, 51*t*, 52–53
- transfusion-associated necrotizing enterocolitis, 140
- transient tachypnea of the newborn, 101*b*, 106*b*
- transitional hypoglycemia, 233
- Transition to Breast Pathway, 187
- transpyloric tube feeding, 190, 194
- triene:tetraene ratio, 128, 156*b*
- triglycerides, 42*b*
 - long-chain, 124, 127, 128, 149
 - medium-chain, 105, 124, 153, 333*t*, 334*t*
- trophic feeds. *See* minimal enteral nutrition (MEN)
- truncus arteriosus, 123*f*
- two-in-one parenteral nutrition, 318–319
- umbilical artery catheters, 58*b*
- umbilical venous catheters, 58*b*
- unconjugated hyperbilirubinemia, 169
 - monitoring and evaluation, 179
 - nutrition-related medical management, 178
 - nutrition therapy for, 172*b*–173*b*
- urine
 - analysis, 21, 22*b*
 - calcium:creatinine ratio, 209
 - osmolality, 92
 - reducing substances, 22*b*
 - sodium, 43*b*
 - specific gravity, 22*b*
 - volume, 22*b*
- ursodeoxycholic acid, for cholestasis, 178
- ursodiol, 155*b*
- US Department of Agriculture, 304
- US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), 57, 72, 74, 148, 297
- vanilla parenteral nutrition. *See* starter parenteral nutrition
- very-low-birth-weight (VLBW) infants, 5*b*, 281. *See also* discharge and follow-up

- enteral nutrient requirements for, 76*t*–78*t*
- hyperglycemia in, 245
- infant formulas for, 271
- and MBD, 254
- minimal enteral nutrition for, 83
- NEC in, 130
- nutrition recommendations for, 272*t*
- parenteral nutrition for, 251*t*
- respiratory disease in, 103, 110
- videofluoroscopic swallow study, 87*b*
- Villar growth chart, 15*t*
- vital signs, 21, 22*b*
- vitamin A, 207
 - in enteral nutrition, 161*b*
 - for neonatal cholestasis, 175*b*–176*b*
 - for prevention of respiratory disease, 104
- vitamin B12, in enteral nutrition, 163*b*
- vitamin D, 42*b*, 48, 199, 203, 207, 245, 253, 274
 - deficiency, 244*b*
 - in enteral nutrition, 161*b*
 - for late preterm infants, 272*t*
 - maternal vitamin D insufficiency, 106
 - supplementation, at discharge, 299
 - for treatment of respiratory disease, 106–107
- vitamin E
 - in enteral nutrition, 161*b*
 - for neonatal cholestasis, 176*b*
- vitamin K
 - in enteral nutrition, 161*b*, 163*b*
 - for neonatal cholestasis, 177*b*
- vitamins
 - conversion table, 313*t*–314*t*
 - enteral requirements for VLBW infants, 78*t*
 - for infants with renal disease, 207
 - in parenteral nutrition, 48, 49*t*, 50
 - products, 339*t*
 - supplements, at discharge, 299, 300*b*–302*b*
- VLBW. *See* very-low-birth-weight infants
- vomiting, 287
 - of, 4–5, 5*b*
 - gain, 283, 285*t*
 - gain, goals for late preterm infants, 277–278
 - insufficient/excessive gain of, 9*b*
 - measurement of, 6–8
 - weight-for-length, 10
- WHO. *See* World Health Organization
- WIC. *See* Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children
- World Health Organization (WHO), 271, 277
 - growth charts, 10, 15*t*, 28, 216, 284*b*
- xanthan gum, 193*t*
- Y-cut nipples, 88
- zinc, 206
 - in enteral nutrition, 161*b*–162*b*
 - for late preterm infants, 274
 - needs, for infants with respiratory diseases, 109
 - for neonatal cholestasis, 178*b*
 - in parenteral nutrition, 51*t*, 53, 160*b*
 - supplementation, at discharge, 299, 302
- zinc acetate, 109
- z score, 6, 28, 29*t*, 115