



Brought to you by Parent Help Line at HSHS St. John's Children's Hospital

Life as A NICU Parent

You are going home without your baby. It is not what you had planned. In the next few weeks, you will learn to balance your time at home with time spent with your baby in the NICU.

Take one day at a time, one week at a time. Do not try to plan for 3 weeks or 3 months. As your body recovers from childbirth, you will feel stronger and more in control.

NICU nurses welcome your call anytime - day, evening or night.

Call:

- **St. John's Hospital (217) 544-6464, or**
- **NICU toll-free # 1-800-331-7963**

Ask for the extension number for your baby's room/pod.

Pod A – 34410 or 34411
Pod B – 34420 or 34421
Pod C – 34430 or 34431
Pod D – 34440 or 34441
Pod E – 34450 or 34451
Pod F – 34460 or 34461
Pod G – 34470 or 34471

You Are a Part of the NICU Team

Babies need parents—even when they are in the NICU.

Be with your baby anytime — day or night:

- *During doctors' rounds.* Ask for the time. You can ask questions and get answers.
- *At feeding times.* Ask the nurse for your baby's feeding times. Fresh breast milk is best. Ask for help with breast feeding or pumping breast milk.

- *At care times.* For babies who do not eat by mouth, care times are 2-6-10 or 4-8-12.
- *At bath time* – twice a week. The nurse will teach you how to care for your baby.

Unlike parents, family and other visitors have limited visiting hours. Ask about the NICU visiting policy.

Learn About the NICU

The NICU may seem scary at first. You have many questions.

Read your NICU packet and booklets.

Talk with NICU parents in the waiting room.

Search the Internet.

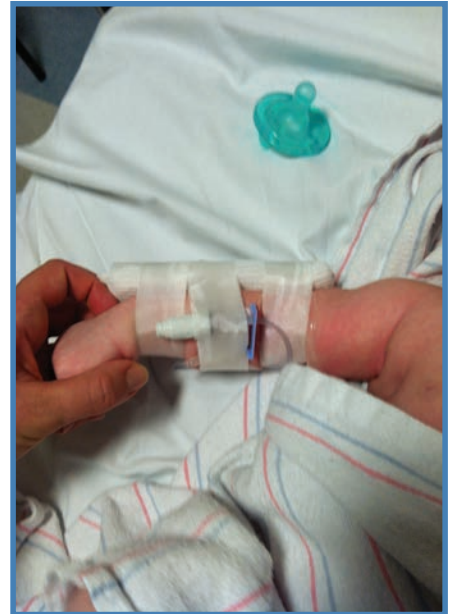
Ask the doctors and nurses questions about your baby.



You will want to know about the:

- Diagnosis.
- Plan of care.
- Treatment plan.
- Tests.
- Medications.
- Equipment.
- Length of time he will be in the NICU.

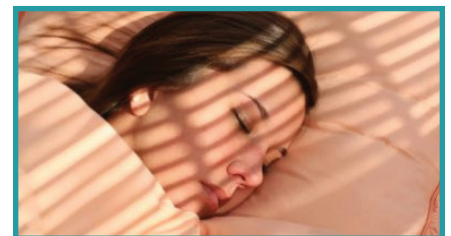
Be patient. Some times doctors or nurses can only talk for a few minutes.



Take Care of Yourself

Parents need emotional and physical energy to *care* for their baby in the NICU. Yet, many NICU parents feel anxious, sad and stressed.

- **Get plenty of rest.** Nap when possible.
 - **Eat healthy.** Avoid junk food. Do not skip meals. Drink 6–8 glasses of water each day.
 - **Accept help from friends and family** — child care, meals, household chores, errands and rides to the hospital.
 - **Find ways to relax and relieve stress.** Take deep breaths. Read. Take a walk.
 - **Avoid making life changes or big decisions at this time.**
- Some parents suffer postpartum depression or post traumatic stress disorder. *Talk to your doctor if you do not feel like yourself.* Talk with other NICU parents. They know how you feel.
- Attend the *Dealing With Feelings Pregnancy and Postpartum Support Group for Women*. Go to parenthelpline.org for dates and times.



For more parenting support, call Parent Help Line at 217-544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week or visit us online at parenthelpline.org or our Facebook page **Parent Help Line at St. John's Children's Hospital**



Bond with Your NICU Baby

You can bond with your baby, even in the NICU.

- Be with your baby - *often*. You will soon feel at ease at her bedside.
- *Provide breast milk*. It is full of nutrients and easy to digest. A nurse will teach you to pump your breasts and store your milk.
- Hold your baby skin-to-skin when he is ready. Called *Kangaroo Care*, it helps both you and your baby.
- Talk or sing softly to your baby. *Your* soft voice will be a comfort.
- Take pictures of your baby. Share them with family and friends. Look at his picture often and as you pump for breast milk.
- Learn to provide some of her daily care. *Do not be afraid*. The nurses will help.

Every baby is unique. Learn the best way to bond with *your* baby. Enjoy your special moments together.



Reading Connects You and Your Baby

Even if you cannot provide hands-on care, you can read books to your baby. She can be in the isolette or in your arms. Reading to your NICU baby helps you and your baby connect and feel close.

Medical experts want babies to hear their parents' voices. A parent's voice can cause a baby's response as early as three days of life. Whether you read the words or talk about a book, your voice lets your baby know that you are close.

Reading Tips for a NICU Parent

As you read to your NICU baby:

- Use a soft, quiet voice.
- Read the words or talk about the pictures.
- Keep your reading time short — just a few minutes.
- Watch your baby as you read. If she shows signs of distress, *stop*. Let her rest.



Learn What Your Baby is Telling You

Premature and very sick babies give cues about how they feel.

In general, babies feel OK when they look relaxed and their movements are smooth. When their arms and legs extend and jerk, they feel stressed.



A baby who is ready to play:

- Is alert.
- Has a calm face.
- Breathes regularly.
- Seeks eye and face contact.
- Turns toward you.
- Puts his hand to his mouth.
- Looks around for sounds.

When your baby feels out of sorts, she may:

- Yawn,
- Sneeze,
- Hiccup,
- Frown,
- Cry or fuss,
- Turn her head away,
- Fall asleep, or
- Gag or vomit.

Your NICU Baby:

- Does not like bright lights. Put a blanket over her isolette.
- Does not like noise. Talk in a soft, calm voice.
- Likes to rest between care tasks. Even if you want to hold her, she may need to rest first.
- Needs special support while sleeping or when held. His nurse will show you how to do this.
- May breathe better on her tummy.
- Can only handle one stimulus at a time. Talk, touch or look. Do not do them at the same time.
- May feel pain when you stroke her skin.

How to Calm Your NICU Baby

A baby's cry tells you something is wrong. Babies have different cries for pain, hunger, discomfort, feeling tired, boredom and feeling tense. Premies less than 32 to 24 weeks gestation will have a shorter, high-pitched cry than an older baby.

You will learn the cues that tell you how your baby feels. The more you are with your baby, the quicker you will learn your baby's likes and dislikes.

To calm your baby, ask your baby's nurse if you can:

- Use "still touch". Lightly rest your hand on a part of his body. *Do not stroke.*

- Help her curl up with her hands close to her face and mouth.
- Provide quiet time when he gets stressed. Let him rest.
- Help her find her fingers or thumb to suck.
- Let him hold your finger.

Your baby's doctor and nurse will show you how much and what type of contact to give.



Babies grow when they are asleep. Keep your baby's area as quiet as possible.