Parenting in the NICU: Getting to Know your Baby
Dear Parents,

**Congratulations on the birth of your new baby!**

We know that most people do not expect to come to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). You probably have a lot of questions. In this book, you will find some information about what you can do for your baby at different gestational ages. Gestational age is the number of weeks your baby grew in the womb. Each baby is different and will develop at his or her own pace. This information is a guide for parents.

It is important for you to be involved with your baby from the very beginning. This book will give you suggestions for things you can do for your baby even if he or she was not due to be born for many months! The more you do from the beginning, the more comfortable and confident you will be caring for your baby when it’s time to go home.

In this book, you will find suggestions of ways that you can take care of your baby while he or she is in the NICU. Even though your baby needs extra care, you are still the most important people in your baby’s life. You are familiar and comforting to your baby. Your baby knows your voice and your smell. Talk softly to your baby to let him or her know you are there. Sleep with a baby blanket to leave with your baby so they can smell you even when you are not at bedside.

Touch is vital to the well-being of all humans, especially babies. Your baby will experience many medical procedures while in the NICU. These are necessary to help your baby grow and heal. Your touch is soothing and positive. The more positive touch your baby receives, the better. It helps growing brains to learn that touch is good. It can help them grow stronger, feel calmer and sleep better.

Welcome to your NICU journey. If you have any questions along the way, don’t wait to ask. Remember, you are the most important people in your baby’s life. We are here to help you so you can help your baby.

Best Wishes,
The NICU Staff
What to expect at 23-27 weeks

- Learn about encircled bed holding
  - Circle your baby with your arms in the incubator
  - No rubbing or stroking
  - Whisper only

- Start kangaroo care as soon as it is safe for your baby

- Watch parent education videos
  (Milk Expression 1 and 2, Antibiotics, Cocooning)

- Read the parent education book

- Meet with a lactation consultant

- Create a special recording for your baby with the music therapist
  - Choose music and songs that are soothing
  - Create a heartbeat bear

- Pump breast milk for your baby

- An occupational therapist will help with care and positioning of your baby. They will also provide gentle movement exercises as tolerated by your baby.

- Hang a picture of your family in the incubator

- Bring in baby blankets from home

- Bring in some items from your nursery to make the room your own

- The Milestone Photo Program will provide free photo keepsakes to welcome your new baby
23-25 weeks – Your baby benefits from:

1. Your touch
   - Hand hugs, kangaroo care

2. Your voice
   - Talk to your baby, tell a story or read a book in a whisper voice

3. Your care
   - Take your baby’s temperature, change a diaper, hand hug your baby while the nurse provides care

4. Feeding
   - Provide breast milk, offer breast milk swabs
26-27 weeks – Your baby benefits from:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Your touch</th>
<th>✦ Hand hugs, kangaroo care</th>
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<tr>
<td>2. Your voice</td>
<td>✦ Talk to your baby, tell a story or read a book in a <strong>low, soft</strong> voice</td>
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<td>3. Your care</td>
<td>✦ Take your baby’s temperature, change a diaper, hand hug your baby while the nurse provides care</td>
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<td>4. Feeding</td>
<td>✦ Provide breast milk, offer breast milk swabs, <strong>hold during feeds and offer a pacifier if awake</strong></td>
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What to expect at 28-30 weeks:

- Start music therapy with kangaroo care
- Watch the parent education videos (Milk Expression 1 and 2, Antibiotics, Cocooning)
- Read the parent education book
- The Milestone Photo Program will provide free photo keepsakes to welcome your new baby
- Create a special recording for your baby with the music therapist
  - Choose music and songs that are soothing
  - Create a heartbeat bear
- Pump breast milk for your baby
- Offer a pacifier when your baby is awake and sucking
- An occupational therapist will be working with your baby to provide gentle movement exercises
28-30 weeks – Your baby benefits from:

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<td>1. Your touch</td>
<td>- Hand hugs, kangaroo care, <strong>begin swaddling after talking to the healthcare team</strong></td>
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<td>2. Your voice</td>
<td>- Talk to your baby, tell a story, read a book or <strong>sing</strong> in a low, soft voice</td>
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<td>- Take your baby’s temperature, change a diaper, hand hug your baby while the nurse provides care, <strong>help the nurse give a bath</strong></td>
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<td>4. Feeding</td>
<td>- Provide breast milk, hold during feeds and offer pacifier if awake, offer breast milk swabs</td>
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What to expect at 31 weeks:

- Kangaroo care (Parents can schedule music therapy with Kangaroo Care)
- Watch parent education videos (Milk Expression 1 and 2, Antibiotics, Cocooning)
- Read the parent education book
- The Milestone Photo Program will provide free photo keepsakes to welcome your new baby
- Create a special recording for your baby with the music therapist
  - Choose music and songs that are soothing
  - Create a heartbeat bear
- Start non-nutritive breastfeeding (if infant is stable)
- If your baby is not ready to start non-nutritive breastfeeding, offer kangaroo care during feeds
- When your baby is working on sucking, add dips of breast milk to the pacifier
- Pump breast milk for your baby
- An occupational therapist will be working with your baby to provide gentle movement exercises
31 weeks – Your baby benefits from:

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What to expect at 32 weeks:

- Kangaroo care (Parents can schedule music therapy with Kangaroo Care)
- Watch the parent education videos (Previous videos along with Breastfeeding 1 and 2)
- Read the parent education book
- A music therapist starts multimodal stimulation (singing, rocking, and positive touch massage)
  - This can be taught to parents if your baby weighs at least 1700 grams or when baby is ready
- The Milestone Photo program can help catch special moments like holding and caring for your baby
- Put baby to breast and pump breast milk
- Readiness scoring for feeding begins
- Bring in clothes from home if your baby is not in an incubator with humidity
- Cycled lighting:
  - Lights on and covers off incubator during the day
  - Covers back on incubator and lights off at night
- An occupational therapist completes a developmental assessment
32 weeks – Your baby benefits from:

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- **1. Your touch**
  - Swaddling, kangaroo care

- **2. Your voice**
  - Talk to your baby, tell a story, read a book or sing in a low, soft voice

- **3. Your care**
  - Take your baby’s temperature, change a diaper, hand hug your baby while the nurse provides care, give a bath

- **4. Feeding**
  - Provide breast milk, hold during feeds and offer pacifier with dips of breast milk if awake, offer breast milk swabs
What to expect at 33-34 weeks:

- Kangaroo care (Parents can schedule music therapy with Kangaroo Care)
- Put baby to breast, pump breast milk or bottle feed if baby is ready
- A lactation consultant can help with breastfeeding
- Watch the parent education videos (Previous videos along with Breastfeeding 1 and 2)
- Read the parent education book
- The occupational therapist completes the feeding assessment. If your baby is ready, you can begin to breast or bottle feed.
- The Milestone Photo Program works to celebrate your baby’s special moments with keepsake cards
- The music therapist offers multimodal stimulation (singing, rocking, and positive touch massage)
  - This can be taught to parents if your baby weighs at least 1700 grams
33-34 weeks – Your baby benefits from:

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<td>Provide breast milk and hold during feeds. <strong>If your baby shows signs of readiness, you may start breastfeeding or giving a bottle.</strong> If your baby is not ready, continue dips of breast milk on the pacifier.</td>
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What to expect at 35-37 weeks:

- Kangaroo Care (Parents can schedule music therapy with Kangaroo Care)
- Watch the parent education videos
- Read the parent education book
- Babies need to be held every day
  - Family
  - Staff
  - Trained Volunteer Cuddlers
- The Milestone Photo Program works to celebrate your baby’s special moments with keepsake cards
- Put baby to breast, pump breast milk or bottle feed
- The occupational therapist will follow your baby to assess for developmental and feeding needs
- The child life specialist and music therapist will assist with developmental goals
- Getting to see the world beyond the crib
  - Swings
  - Bouncy seats
  - Feeding and infant support pillows
    (These can be brought in from home.)
- Begin Safe Sleep practices when baby takes more than 50% of his or her feeding by nipple
### 35-37 weeks – Your baby benefits from:

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What to expect at 38 weeks and older:

- Kangaroo Care (Parents can schedule music therapy with Kangaroo Care)
- Watch parent education videos
- Read the parent education book
- You may discuss proper play activities that are good for your baby with:
  - the occupational therapist
  - the music therapist
  - the child life specialist
- Ask the nurse, occupational therapist, child life specialist, or music therapist about bringing toys from home
- Put baby to breast, pump breast milk or bottle feed
- Take stroller walks in the unit
- Use floor mats, toys, and books for play time and tummy time
- Always place baby in safe sleep position
- Partner with the Milestone Photo Program to capture your baby’s development through pictures
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**Definitions**

- **Child life specialist:** pediatric health care professionals who work with families and babies to help them cope with the challenges of hospitalization. They provide information, support, and guidance to parents and family members. They work with babies as they grow and develop.

- **Encircled bed holding:** a special way of holding when the baby must stay in bed. The baby is moved close to the edge of the bed and the parent sits next to the bed and encircles the baby with their arms/hands placing their face as close to the baby as possible.

- **Gestational age:** the number of weeks your baby grew in the womb.

- **Hand hugs:** placing hands firmly around and over the baby to help them feel safe and secure.

- **Incubator:** a closed bed that can be set at a temperature and humidity to keep your baby warm.

- **Kangaroo care:** a method of caring for babies in which the infants are held skin to skin with a parent for as many hours as possible.

- **Milestone Photo Program:** Every week free photographs of your baby are provided by the art therapist and volunteers. The photos document growth, development, and NICU experiences. A signed consent form is needed for photos to be taken.
 Definitions

- **Multimodal stimulation**: singing, rocking, and positive touch to help babies learn to tolerate sounds, movement and touch at the same time.

- **Music therapy**: a type of therapy that uses music to promote, maintain, and restore health. A music therapist can provide information, guidance, support with growth and development, and can help families cope with having a child in the hospital.

- **Non-nutritive breastfeeding**: the baby suckles at the empty breast for practice but does not take breast milk into their mouth.

- **Nutritive breastfeeding**: the baby suckles at the full breast in attempt to drink breast milk.

- **Occupational therapy**: a type of therapy that will help your baby to meet their developmental and feeding milestones.

- **Safe Sleep**: program to encourage parents to have their baby sleep on his back on a flat, firm surface in his own crib or bassinet.

- **Swaddling**: to wrap a baby in a cloth that supports the baby in the fetal position. This position offers the baby comfort and support.

- **Volunteer cuddlers**: Specially trained volunteers who provide soothing and comfort, cuddling and rocking of babies to supplement nursing care.
Who’s Who in the NICU?

Babies in the NICU need 24-hour care from a variety of special doctors and healthcare professionals. These include:

- Neonatologists
- Nurse practitioners
- Registered nurses
- Leadership team
- Residents
- Lactation consultants
- Medical social workers
- Respiratory therapists
- Occupational therapists
- Music therapist
- Art therapist

- Child life specialist
- Chaplains
- Unit greeters
- Unit clerks
- Parent liaison
- Volunteer cuddlers
Who’s Who in the NICU?

Meet the special doctors and healthcare professionals giving babies in the NICU 24-hour care.

Angela Lai, MD
Seth Malin, MD
Robin L. Pierucci, MD
Andrea Scheurer-Monaghan, MD
Anthony Tackman, MD
Jennifer Wherley, MD
Emily Senske, BSN, RN

Kari Blair, NNP
Linda Corliss, NNP
Keri Dykema, NNP
Brenda McCrum, NNP
Shelly Schafer, NNP
Deb Stewart, NNP
Jennifer Winkel, NNP
Kimberly Yeck, NNP