



Information Sheet

NICU Tips

Having a baby in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) can be an exhausting and anxiety-inducing experience. Very few families will have had prior experience in the NICU, so your first few visits may be confronting.

The NICU is staffed by specialised doctors, nurses and other professionals who are experienced in looking after babies who enter the world needing intensive care.

Life in NICU with your CDH baby can be overwhelming; our families have put together some tips and tricks to help make your time in NICU less stressful.

We always encourage you to speak with your baby's nurse, doctor or a social worker about how to make the most of your time in NICU with your baby. They may be able to advise of local services or facilities to make your visit more comfortable.

Record your voice

Borrow or buy a voice recorder or mobile phone with recording function. Record yourself reading books, telling stories, or singing lullabies - anything you feel like.

Your baby's nurse can play this for your baby when you cannot be by their side, or as background noise whilst they are resting.

Personalise the room

Check with staff - can you bring in a picture of mum and dad, or a blanket from home? Perhaps even one of mummy's shirts so that baby is comforted by mum's scent, even when you are not there.

Not sure what you can or cannot do? Ask your baby's care team - they will be more than happy to advise you the best ways to personalise baby's room.

Make memories

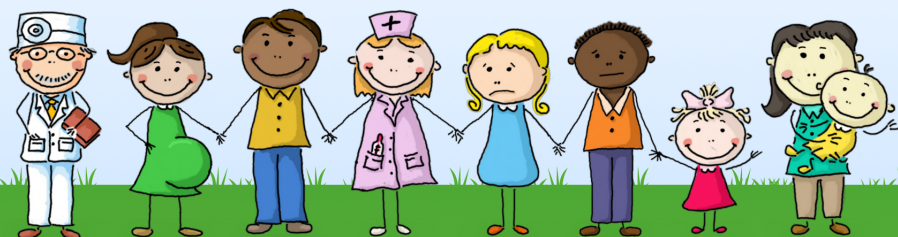
Every moment is precious. NICU is a whirlwind of experiences and time there seems to move in strange ways. Take pictures, write down your thoughts, talk to your baby.

Bring in a story book and read, or sing baby your favourite song. Jot these down in a notepad or baby book - something you can look back on in years to come.



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Be involved in baby's care

Even though you can not pick up your baby whenever you would like, you can still be involved in their care. Talk to the nursing or social work staff about which "cares" you can be involved with.

It might be as simple as putting some lanolin on your baby's lips, but being the one who does it can help you to feel more connected to your precious baby.

Record developments

You might feel as though you spend most of your time sitting at baby's bedside doing very little but you will be surprised by how tiring it can be, and how quickly you forget the details. Take note of baby's medications, favourite

nurses, likes or dislikes. Progress and development look different in NICU, so try not to compare your child to others. One day it will seem like a lifetime ago, and you'll be glad to have the memories.

Get out for short breaks

Leaving the hospital may feel counter-intuitive, but it is important to get out and take a deep breath every now and then. Hours spent on the NICU ward can sap your mental energy; short breaks will help you manage the rollercoaster of emotions as well as giving you a break from the constant

beeping of monitors and machines. Sometimes a breath of fresh air is all you need to keep carrying on. If you are concerned about not being by baby's bedside, ask for guidance from your baby's nurse.

Understand that there will be ups and downs

Despite understanding that NICU is the best place for your baby to be, there can be intense fluctuations in emotions which can be unexpectedly triggered. It is normal to feel waves of both positive and negative emotions; know that

this is normal when you have a baby in NICU. Talk to your baby's care team, social worker, a trusted support person or medical professional if you feel as though you need help with your experience.

Be involved in decision making

Everything in NICU usually operates like a well-oiled machine. It can be easy to feel like a bystander when your baby is in NICU. Your baby's care team have his or her best interests in mind, but that does not mean you cannot be involved in discussions and decisions about their care.

Find out when ward rounds or shift handovers are scheduled, and ask to be present. This helps you to understand the decisions being made, and gives you the opportunity to ask questions and have input.

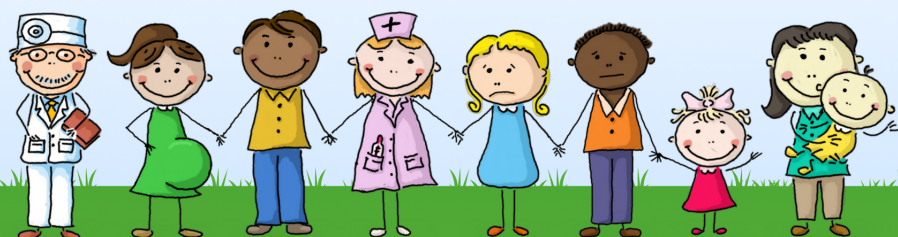
Introduce the family

Most NICUs have strict visitation rules to help protect the babies from the expert staff from illness. This can be frustrating if you want to introduce grandparents, aunts and uncles or special friends to your latest addition.

Whilst you will likely need to keep it to a minimum to reduce over-stimulation, ask your baby's nurse if you can use a video calling service to show off your precious bundle to family and friends.



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