

# Caring for Your Infant in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)

Your newborn is a patient inside the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). Knowing how to parent your medically fragile baby can be hard. Below are tips to help you feel more comfortable parenting inside the NICU.

1. **Decorate your baby's bedside.** Bring pictures of your family or pets. Cover the isolette with a favorite baby quilt. If you have older children, ask them to draw pictures. (Always ask your physician or nurse if it is okay to place something inside your baby's bed.)
2. **Learn your baby's hospital schedule:** Feedings, diaper changes, linen changes, baths, and medication times. Keep a list of times at your baby's bedside. Plan to arrive at these times (when possible) and help with your baby's care.
3. **Protect your baby from bright lights and loud noises.** Newborn baby's have many things to get used to when they come into this world. There are new sounds, bright lights, and people touching them. Newborn babies, especially if born early, have a difficult time processing all of this. It is important for people to speak softly, approach quietly, and keep visual stimulation (lights, reflections) low.
4. **Learn you baby's signals.** What does your baby look like when unhappy or happy? Writing this down in a notebook will help others learn what your baby needs too.
5. **Leave a few favorite storybooks at your baby's bed side.** Reading to you child is a "normal" way to bond

with your baby. Your child recognizes your voice. Hearing you softly read is comforting.

6. **If you are able, try to pump breast milk for your baby.** Mother's often feel like this is something they can do to care for their baby. Breast milk is also "good medicine".
7. **Sleep with a clean swatch of cloth against your breast.** Leave this cloth with your baby. Your scent is very soothing to your baby. (Remember to ask your physician or nurse how they would like for you to do this.)
8. **Ask if there is a way to communicate your baby's likes and dislikes.** Your baby's nurses change from shift to shift. Because you are often with your baby the most, you will know things about your baby that staff will not know. A communication board or book will help share important details about your baby.
9. **Request to Kangaroo Care:** skin to skin holding. Often this soothes your baby and makes his/her heart rate and breathing rate more normal. Ask when you can do Kangaroo Care with your baby. If your nurse says no, ask again later. Sometimes "no" means your baby is not yet ready or that your nurse is not presently able to help you.
10. **When your baby is able to wear clothes, ask if you can wash soiled clothing at home.** This gives parents a way to care for their baby when they are at home. (Find out from your nurse what detergent is best for washing your baby's clothes.)
11. **Bring a small laundry bag to keep at your baby's bed side.** Request that the baby clothes you bring be stored there after they are worn. Use markers to write your baby's name and decorate the bag.

12. **Ask if there are parent groups or classes available.** Your nurse may be able to give you a schedule. Learning about your baby's needs and gaining support from other parents is helpful.
13. **Remember that you can call the NICU day or night to check on you baby.** You are not bothering anyone. NICU staff members want you to feel comfortable leaving your baby in their good care.
14. **Follow your instincts.** If you feel something is not right, tell your baby's nurse and/or physician. Request follow-up. Ask for results.
15. **Ask questions.** All questions are good questions. NICU staff want to help you understand all the different part of your baby's care.