

# Raising a Premature Baby in the

## Helpful Tips for Parents

Having a premature baby can be frightening even for the most experienced parents. Here are answers to some questions you may be asking about a stay at a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

### How long will my baby be in the NICU?

Since each baby's medical case is different, it is hard to determine the length of hospital stay. Some babies will only be in the hospital for a few days while others will need to stay for a few months. It is important to remember that the baby is growing in the NICU like she would in the womb. Just as growing in the womb takes time, growing in the NICU can take just as long or longer.

### How do I become a part of my baby's medical team?

**\*Form a good relationship with the NICU staff.** As you feel more comfortable with the staff you will feel more comfortable asking questions and trusting them.

**\*Ask to be informed on baby's medical condition and care.** You can ask to be called when there is a major change in the status of your baby. You can also call them to receive updates.

**\*Insist that you be included in choices about your baby's care.** You are the parent, it is important that you be involved in major decisions concerning your baby's care.

**\*Ask questions.** Ask any questions you may have concerning your baby's care, condition, staff, stay, equipment, medications, and any other topics you are concerned about.

**\*Ask when and how you can help care for your baby.** Once your baby is healthy enough you may be able to help change diapers, feed, and bathe your baby at scheduled "touch times." Until that time happens ask your NICU staff the best way for you to care for your baby.

### How much time a day can I spend with my baby?

Parents should be allowed to spend all day with their baby, though during shift changes, emergencies, or certain procedures you may be asked to leave. The baby also may have scheduled times of rest and activity you need to be aware of.



### Can I touch or hold my baby?

Premature babies get over-stimulated very easily. Therefore, depending on the baby's condition, there may be scheduled "touch times" where you can touch and talk to your baby. Depending on how ill your baby is you may only be able to talk quietly or softly touch your baby. If the medical staff feels your baby can handle the stimulation you may be able to hold or even do kangaroo care with your baby. Kangaroo care is where the baby is placed directly on your chest underneath your shirt. The skin-to-skin contact helps to bond with your baby as well as it helps your baby gain weight and maintain body warmth.

### How can I enrich our stay in the NICU?

**\*Focus on your baby.** Allow yourself to enjoy your baby. When stressed take a calm breath. Your baby can feel when you are stressed so it important to remain calm.

**\*Read, talk, and sing to your baby.** If the medical staff allows it, you can sing to your baby, read your favorite children's book, or talk softly to your baby. Talk about daily activities, family members, and anything you feel comfortable talking about.

**\*Decorate your baby's space.** Ask if you can bring pictures, stuffed animals, or blankets to put along or in your baby's bed. You may ask if you can leave a CD player with a CD of your voice or a CD of soothing music.

**\*Enjoy and celebrate milestones.** Though it is hard raising a baby in the NICU, savor every hurdle jumped and every milestone crossed. Take pictures and mark special milestones on a calendar. It is a good way to realize how far you have come.

**\*Take care of yourself.** Don't feel guilty if you get a cup of coffee or go to dinner. It is important to rest during the calm times so you can have enough strength for the difficult times.