



Taking Baby Home:

Ten Important Things to Know

You are getting ready to take your baby home!

- Many moms and dads are nervous to take their baby home from the NICU. You may wish your favorite nurse could come home with you.
- It's normal to have some worries about going home with your baby. But it's also important to feel excited, comfortable and prepared.
- In addition to everything you learn in the NICU, this information can help make your home safe and happy for your baby.

1. You can never spoil your baby with too much attention.



Have you heard people say that if you pick up a baby whenever he cries, you will spoil him.

This is not true!

You can never spoil your baby with too much attention.

- Your baby needs comfort when he cries. Your baby depends on you to make him feel better.
- By comforting your baby, you are easing his distress as well as helping your baby learn how to calm himself.
- It can be exhausting to constantly comfort and soothe your baby. Sometimes you may need a break! Allow yourself to get support from a trusted friend or family member who can help you take care of your baby.

2. Don't let anyone shake your baby.



Everyone feels frustrated from time to time when they're tired, stressed and caring for a baby. It is normal to feel this way, but it is important to know that shaking a baby could hurt your baby.

It can be frustrating to hear your baby cry, and it can be frustrating when it is difficult to soothe him.

Don't let anyone shake your baby.

- Shaking a baby to stop him from crying or for any reason can hurt your baby, cause brain damage or even kill your baby.
- If you're stressed when your baby is crying, put the baby down in a safe place and walk out of the room to take a break. It's better to let the baby cry than to become too stressed or angry. Call a trusted family member or friend to help with your baby and relieve your stress.

Don't let anyone shake your baby.

- Only leave your baby with friends, family members and babysitters you know and trust. The person should be patient with babies and understand that babies cry and need to be clean, dry, fed, warm and comforted.
- Make sure anyone you leave your baby with knows that he should never shake or hit your baby.

3. Try to keep germs away from your baby.



Why do you think most of the babies in the NICU sleep in incubators?

A very important reason many babies are in incubators is to protect them from germs that are in the air and around them.

Keep germs away from your baby.

- Your baby could catch illnesses from those around him.
- In the NICU, you are used to carefully washing your hands and limiting visitors. At home, this is still very important.
- Make sure visitors to your home are healthy and wash their hands.
- Remind your older children to wash their hands before touching the baby and to keep their distance if they are sick. It's easy for kids to forget -- they don't mean any harm. It's up to adults to lovingly remind them.

4. Put your baby to sleep on his back.



In the NICU, your baby might be on his tummy to sleep, but your baby has monitors that let staff know if he stops breathing.

At home, always put your baby to sleep on his back.

Put your baby to sleep on his back.

- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is called crib death. The causes of SIDS aren't known. Putting your baby to sleep on his back can lower your baby's risk of SIDS.
- When home from the NICU, ALWAYS put your baby to sleep on his back in a safety-approved crib with a firm mattress and a fitted sheet (unless specified by your health care provider).
- Your baby should sleep in his own crib or bassinette, not in your bed.
- Always put your baby *back* to sleep.

Dont's of putting your baby to sleep

- Do NOT put anything in your baby's crib except your baby. This includes blankets, loose clothing, fluffy bedding, pillows, toys or stuffed animals.
- Do NOT let anything cover your baby's face.
- Do NOT let your baby overheat. Dress your baby in sleep clothing that reflects the season/temperature. Keep the room at a comfortable temperature for an adult.
- Do NOT share your bed with your baby; but it is good to share your room with your baby for at least the first 6 months.
- Do NOT let anyone smoke around your baby.

5. When home with your baby, give him tummy time.



While you should always put your baby to sleep on his back, it is important to play with your baby while he is on his tummy. This is called tummy time. Tummy time helps your baby develop upper-body muscles.

Tummy Time

- Tummy time is only for when your baby is awake. Try to spend about 10 to 20 minutes a day in tummy time. You can break this up into several shorter sessions throughout the day.
- Tummy time helps your baby develop so she can push up, roll over, sit up, crawl and pull to a stand.
- Babies may cry and fuss when put on their tummies. This is normal, but tummy time is still important.
- Bring yourself down to her eye level so she can look at you. Use a rattle or toy to play with her and get her attention.

6. If your baby was premature, speak to your provider about ways to lessen the chance your next baby will be born early.



Do you know what the definition of premature birth is?

Premature birth is birth that happens too early, before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy.

Recurrence prevention

- This information is not meant to make you feel guilty or show you did anything wrong.
- Sometimes even if you do everything right, you can still have a baby born too early.
- However, if you have had a premature baby, you are at higher risk of your next baby being born early, too.

Recurrence prevention

- There may be things you and your provider can do next time to help you stay pregnant longer. It is best to talk to your provider about these things before you get pregnant again.
- Wait at least 18 months after your baby's birth before getting pregnant again, but you should talk to your provider to see what's right for you. This gives your body time to recover.
- Ask your provider if you should get progesterone to help prevent preterm birth.
- All women, whether they have had a premature baby or not, should meet with their provider before they get pregnant again.

7. Take a multivitamin with 400 mcg of folic acid every day.



The easiest way for every woman of childbearing age to get enough folic acid is to take a multivitamin with 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid in it each day.

Folic acid

- Folic acid can help prevent birth defects of the brain and spinal cord called neural tube defects (NTDs). Folic acid works to prevent these birth defects only if taken before getting pregnant and during early pregnancy.
- Folic acid is added to grain, cereal, and some other foods. Folate, the natural form of the B vitamin, is found in leafy vegetables.
- Start taking folic acid now if you are not already doing so.

8. Eat healthy foods



Good nutrition is important for your baby and you. Eating healthy helps you to grow, learn and fight disease.

Try to eat foods from each of the five food groups every day. Drink lots of water. Eating healthy can help give you the strength to take care of your baby. As your baby gets big enough to have solid food, your child can follow your healthy eating habits!

Healthy eating and breastfeeding

- Breast milk is the best food for most babies. Breast milk contains all the nutrients your baby needs for healthy growth and development during the first 6 months of life, as well as substances that help protect her from many illnesses.
- Breastfeeding provides health benefits for you, too! It helps you to get back to your pre-pregnancy weight. Breastfeeding also can help you bond with your baby.

Breastfeeding

- Breast milk contains substances called antibodies, which are cells that fight infections. Antibodies help protect a baby from many illnesses. Studies suggest that breastfed babies may be less likely to die from SIDS. Breast milk is easy for a baby to digest, so he may have less gas and discomfort than a formula-fed baby.
- The health benefits of breastfeeding can last a lifetime. Children and adults who were breastfed are less likely to develop asthma, diabetes and certain cancers (leukemia, lymphoma and Hodgkin's disease) than babies who were fed formula. Babies who were breastfed may be less likely than formula-fed babies to become obese later in life.
- If you have problems or discomfort breastfeeding or decide not to breastfeed, formula has many vital nutrients for your baby. Make feeding time a special time to connect with and be close to your baby!

Who should not breastfeed their baby?

- Women who have HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) should not breastfeed because they can pass the virus on to their babies in the breast milk.
- Women who have certain types of cancers. Some medicines used to treat certain cancers can pass through breastmilk and harm a baby.
- Women with a baby who has galactosemia. Babies with this genetic disorder can't digest the sugar in breastmilk (or any kind of milk). It can make them very sick. Babies with the disorder need to eat formula that is not made with milk of any kind. Your baby gets tested for the disorder and other problems soon after birth.
- If you are taking any medications, talk to your health care provider. Some medications may not be safe to take while breastfeeding.

9. Keep your baby away from cigarette smoke.



Cigarette smoke is harmful to babies, both during and after birth.

It is harmful to babies born healthy and harmful to babies born sick or premature.

Babies and children of smokers are more likely to get bronchitis, pneumonia, colds, coughs, middle-ear infections, and asthma and are at higher risk for SIDS than babies of non-smokers.

Keep your baby away from cigarette smoke.

- Babies have very small lungs and airways that get even smaller when they breathe smoke-filled air. Smoking can make it hard for your baby to breathe. It can cause lung problems like bronchitis and pneumonia, that could put your baby back in the hospital.
- Give the biggest gift you can to your child and yourself so he has a much better chance for a healthy life. Give your baby the gift of clean air to breathe.
- Ask your family, friends, baby sitters and day care workers not to smoke in any areas near your baby.
- If you have another baby, quit smoking now to reduce your future baby's risks of being born early, with low birthweight (babies born weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces or 2,500 grams) or with a birth defect (problems that happen while a baby is growing during pregnancy).

10. Get support from others who understand.



shareyourstory.org

To share your personal story or to read stories from other parents who had a NICU experience, visit this online, global March of Dimes community.

Get support from others who understand.

- Having a new baby is a beautiful experience, but it can be a stressful one. Having a baby born sick or premature can add to your stress.
- Post-pregnancy hormones can make you feel emotional – sad, stressed or overwhelmed.
- There are a number of things that can help you manage your feelings:
 - Get plenty of rest.
 - Eat healthy meals.
 - Do something active every day.
 - Find a supportive family member, friend, counselor or other trusted person to talk to about things that cause stress.
 - Visit shareyourstory.org, an online community for NICU families where members give each other support and wisdom, share stories and build online connections with others who understand.

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7. Take a multivitamin with 400 mcg of folic acid every day.
8. Eat healthy foods.
9. Keep your baby away from cigarette smoke.
10. Get support from others who understand at shareyourstory.org

For more information and support,
go to marchofdimes.com.

March of Dimes Mission

To improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality.



Funds research
aimed at preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality



Helps moms
have full-term pregnancies and healthy babies



Supports families
by comforting them when their baby needs help to survive and thrive

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