# Learn What Your Baby is Telling You

#### Premature and very sick babies have likes and dislikes.

They give cues about how they feel. Cues include a change in:

- Color
- Breathing,
- Heart rate, and
- Muscle tone.

In general, babies feel OK when they look relaxed and their movements are smooth. When their arms and legs extend and jerk, they feel stressed.

# A baby who is ready to play:

- Is alert,
- Has a calm face,
- Breathes regularly,
- Seeks eye and face contact,

- Turns toward you,
- Puts his hand to his mouth, and
- Looks around for sounds.

# When your baby feels out of sorts, she may:

- Yawn,
- Sneeze,
- Hiccup,
- Frown,
- Cry or fuss,
- Turn her head away,
- Fall asleep,
- Gag or vomit.



- 1. She does not like bright lights. Put a blanket over her isolette.
- 2. He does not like noise. Talk in a soft, calm voice. Ask visitors to talk in a soft, quiet voice.
- 3. She likes to rest between care tasks. Even if you want to hold her, she may need to rest first.
- 4. He needs special support while sleeping or when held. His nurse will show you how to do this.
- 5. She may breathe better on her tummy.
- 6. He can only handle one stimulus at a time. Talk, touch or look. Do not do them at the same time.
- 7. She feels pain when you stroke her skin.

# Skills to Learn Before Your Baby Goes Home

As you feel stronger, tell your baby's nurse that you want to learn these skills. She teaches you during feeding and bath time. Check off each skill that you learn.

#### The NICU staff helps parents learn. Do Bedside Tasks **Learn Other Baby Care Keep Baby Safe & Healthy** ■ Medications □ Hold baby □ Cord care ☐ Preemie development ☐ Circumcision care □ Calm baby ☐ Safe sleep practices **□** Do Kangaroo Care □ Nail care □ CPR ■ Nasal suctioning ☐ Provide head support ☐ Choking/bulb suctioning ☐ Car seat safety ☐ Learn about baby's cues ☐ When to call the doctor ■ Back to sleep □ Feed baby **□** Immunizations ☐ Change diaper ☐ Ear care **□** Thermoregulation ☐ Dress baby □ Genital care **□** Take temperature ■ Bathe baby

#### Printing provided by The Sangamon County Medical Society & Alliance Foundation

# Neonatal Intensive Baby Time











An Easy-to-Read Booklet for NICU Parents
Brought to you by Parent Help Line
at St. John's Children's Hospital



### Life as A NICU Parent

#### Babies need parents-even when they are in the NICU.

You are going home without your baby. It is not what you had planned. In the next few weeks, you will learn to balance your time at home with time spent with your baby in the NICU.

Take one day at a time, one week at a time. Do not try to plan for 3 weeks or 3 months. As your body recovers from childbirth, you will feel stronger and more in control.

# your baby in the NICU. more in control. You Are a Part of the NICU Team

# Be with your baby anytime — day or night:

- During doctors' rounds
   9:30 a.m., 4 p.m. and
  10 p.m. (9:30 a.m. is the best).
- At feeding or care times. Ask his nurse for his times. Either you or the nurse will feed your baby every three hours. Fresh breast milk is best for your baby. Nurses feed at 8-11-2-5 or 9-12-3-6.
- At care times for babies who do not eat by mouth. Care times are 2-6-10 or 4-8-12.
- At bath time twice a week. The nurse will teach you how to care for your baby.

Unlike parents, family and other visitors have limited visiting hours.

NICU nurses welcome your call anytime day, evening or night.

#### Call:

- St. John's Hospital (217) 544-6464, or
- NICU toll-free # 1-800-331-7963

Ask for the extension number for your baby's room/pod.

Pod A – 34410 or 34411

Pod B – 34410 or 34421

Pod C - 34430 or 34431

Pod D – 34440 or 34441

Pod E – 34450 or 34451

Pod F – 34460 or 34461

Pod G – 34470 or 34471

# Learn About the NICU

The NICU may seem scary at first. You will have many questions.



Read your NICU packet and booklets. They answer many of your questions.

Talk with NICU parents in the waiting room. They will help you.

Ask your baby's doctors and nurses questions about your baby. They teach you to care for your baby:

- Listen. *Really listen!* You may want to take a few notes.
- Ask questions when you do not understand. Make a list of questions and concerns. Carry this list with you.
- Use "I messages" to express your feelings and concerns. For example, "I am afraid to hold my baby," or "I want to see my baby, but I can only be with my baby after 7 p.m".
- Be patient. Some times doctors or nurses can only talk for a few minutes. Another baby or family may have an urgent need.

## Take Care of Yourself

Parents need emotional and physical energy to care for their baby in the NICU.



- Get plenty of rest. Nap when possible.
- Accept help from friends and family. Tell them you need help with child care, meals, household chores, errands and rides to the hospital.
- Avoid making life changes or big decisions at this time.

- Eat healthy. Avoid junk food. Do not skip meals. Drink 6–8 glasses of water each day.
- Take deep breaths and relax to relieve stress at the NICU and before bedtime.
- Be aware of your feelings. NICU parents may feel anxious, sad and stressed.
- Talk to your doctor if you do not feel like yourself. Some NICU moms and dads suffer from postpartum depression or post-traumatic stress disorder.

• Talk with other NICU parents. They know how you feel. Sign up for our Parent-to-Parent mentoring program (P2P).

Our Parent-to-Parent program matches you with a trained mentor. She:

- Has had an infant who needed special care in the NICU.
- Understands that your NICU stay is unexpected and emotional.
- Remembers how alone, confused and afraid she felt sometimes.
- Realizes the support of staff, mentors and friends helps.

For more support, call Parent Help Line at 217-544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week or visit us online at parenthelpline.org or our Facebook page Parent Help Line at St. John's Children's Hospital

# **Take Care of Your Baby**

You are part of the NICU team. Your love and care help your baby.





- Provide breast milk. It is easy to digest and full of nutrients. A nurse will teach you to pump your breasts and store your milk. She will give you a breastfeeding booklet.
- Be with your baby often. You will soon feel at ease at her bedside.
- Enjoy your special moments together. It is a time for you to learn and love your baby.
- Hold her skin-to-skin when she is ready. This is

- *Kangaroo Care*. It helps her condition improve.
- Talk or sing softly to him. *Your* soft voice will be a comfort.
- Take pictures of her. Share them with family and friends. Look at her picture as you pump your breasts.
- Learn to provide some of his daily care. *Do not be afraid*. You need to know how to care for him when he goes home.

# **How to Calm Your NICU Baby**

Babies cry when something is wrong. They have different cries for pain, hunger, discomfort, feeling tired, boredom and feeling tense. Preemies less than 32 to 24 weeks gestation will have a shorter, high-pitched cry than an older baby.



Babies grow when they are asleep.

You will learn the cues that tell you how your baby feels. The more you are with your baby, the quicker you will learn about what your baby likes and dislikes. You can calm your baby:

- Use "still touch". Lightly rest your hand on a part of his body. Do not stroke.
- Help her curl up with her hands close to her face and mouth.

- Provide a "time-out" if he gets stressed while you are providing care. Let him rest.
- Help her find her fingers or thumb to suck.
- Let him hold your finger.
- Keep her *area* as quiet as possible.

Ask your baby's nurse before you use these calming techniques.