

When Baby is in the NICU: 10 Ways to Bond With Your Child

The birth of your child should be a happy occasion. But what happens when his arrival comes too soon and your baby is whisked away to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)? You wonder what your role is as a parent of a premature baby. Your baby appears so fragile. The machines alarm whenever your baby's breathing slows or heart rate drops. You're intimidated and unsure of your responsibilities in this nightmare.

Bonding with your child is your top priority. Studies have shown that moms who actively participate in the care of their newborn baby while he is in the NICU are less likely to experience postpartum depression. In addition, babies who receive the human touch, especially by their parents, tend to spend fewer days in the hospital.

The interaction you'll be able to enjoy with your child will be somewhat dependant on his medical status. However, there are still many ways you can bond with your baby:

Routine care. Your baby will be placed on a care routine that will vary based on various factors (these will differ by hospital location and the medical plan for your child). For example, every three hours the schedule might include changing your baby's diaper, taking his temperature, and feeding him. Ask your nurses if you can actively participate in these activities. As a parent of a premature baby your ability to be his caregiver may be minimized, while he is hospitalized, due to the medical aspects of his condition. Take every opportunity to touch your baby and be his parent.

Maintain your schedule. An important component to participating in routine care is for you to maintain a visitation schedule. When your baby is doing well, his daily schedule should be very consistent so you can plan your time at the hospital to maximize your ability to involve yourself in his routine. In addition, the nurses can plan certain activities, such as baths, for when you will be visiting.

Light touch. Sometimes the neonatologist (your baby's doctor) and nurses recommend that your baby remain in his incubator or crib. This is extremely common when a baby is being given phototherapy for jaundice or born very premature. If you are unable to hold your baby, then place your hand in his bed and allow him to wrap his tiny little hand around one of your fingers. This will provide comfort to you both.

Kangaroo Care. One of the most wonderful experiences a parent of a premature baby can have is Kangaroo Care. This is where you hold your baby skin-to-skin. Kangaroo Care serves many purposes, the primary of which is to allow the parent to hold the baby while keeping your baby's body temperature at the correct degree.

Human voice. Just as you talked with your baby when he was in your uterus, continue to talk to him. Even conversations between you and your partner can be beneficial to your child while he is in the NICU.

Music. The NICU is a very loud place. You will hear machines alarm at every bedside. Try introducing classical or soothing music that you might listen to at home. Once he leaves the NICU you can play this music for him at home and hopefully he'll find comfort in the familiar sounds.

Items from home. Some hospitals encourage parents to bring photos of themselves to place inside the incubator. You can also ask if you're allowed to bring clothing or blankets from home to dress your baby and provide the smells from home he'll soon experience daily.

Ask questions. An important aspect of your role is to actively participate in his medical plan, not just his routine care (touching him). As the parent you have a right to know the treatment protocol for your child. For example, you'll probably want to know the results of his blood tests because that can tell you whether or not he has an infection. With that information you can then ask the nurses and doctors questions about your baby's medical treatment plan. How do the new test results change his medications, feedings, predicted outcome, etc. You have a right to be involved not only in the routine care, but his medical treatment plan too.

Pump/Nurse. Breast milk is extremely important for a premature baby. According to many sources, the breast milk produced by a new mom is tailored to the birth of the baby. They surmise that the breast milk from a woman who delivered prematurely has a different composition than that produced by a woman who delivered a full-term baby. Your baby has an immature digestive system, so pump breast milk while your baby is in the NICU to reduce the possibility of complications associated with feedings.

Channel positive thoughts. One of the most challenging aspects of the NICU is the continual roller coaster. It is easy to be very positive when your baby is doing well. It's just as easy to expect the worst when your baby has bad days. Be careful not to research too much about all of the things that could go wrong as this can lead you to a state of panic or depression. Although it may be more challenging on bad days, try to channel positive energy to your baby. When one of my daughters was sick while in the NICU I'd say, "You are a strong little girl. You are getting better. I love you." In my heart

I wasn't sure she would recover from her illness, but I convinced her she would. Today she's a healthy and happy four-year-old.

The premature birth of your baby can be one of the most traumatic events of your life. Even though the nurses and doctors are doing their best to care for your premature baby, your child also needs love and reassurance from you in addition to medical attention from the hospital staff. The NICU can be a very scary place. When you take part in the care of your child, however, you become empowered and are able to handle the experience more easily.

About the Author

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[Tiny Toes](#).

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