

Patient Information Leaflet

Supporting your baby's development

26-28 weeks gestation



INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Produced By: NICU

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Congratulations on the birth of your baby. Having a baby in a Neonatal Unit can be worrying but this leaflet will tell you a little about what to expect from your baby at this age and, importantly, how you can help their development.

It is not designed to replace information you will get from your baby's doctors, nurses and therapists. If you have concerns or questions about your baby's development please talk to the Neonatal staff.

All babies are individuals and each one will develop at a slightly different rate. Your baby's development will be affected by gestation at birth, how much they weigh, and by how well they are. Each baby's genetic make up will also play a part in how they develop and mature. In the womb the baby will experience a variety of sensations – some pleasant, some not so pleasant. The baby will move around in the amniotic fluid and be able to get hands to mouth. They will hear their mother's voice and other sounds from outside. The baby will sleep and be active according to mother's daily pattern of activity.

The newborn preterm baby has to quickly accommodate to their new surroundings. These surroundings affect behaviour and development and it is important that we recognise how your baby reacts and how we can help their development to progress.

This is a time when your baby's brain is growing at a very rapid rate and it is important that what we all do and how we do it is as developmentally appropriate as possible.

Your baby is 26 – 28 weeks gestation (about 12 – 14 weeks early)

At this age your baby's senses are very immature. Because your baby is so small, care will be specialised. Your baby needs gentle touch, dim lighting, and as little noise as possible.

The Neonatal Unit staff will help you to care for your baby. Always ask the nurse looking after your baby about their condition before you touch or handle. Ask if you need help or you don't understand what is happening

Touching and holding

Uncontrolled movements such as twitches, tremors and jerks are common at this stage. Your baby's skin is fragile and your baby *may* not be ready to be held out of the incubator.

- **What you can do to help**

Speak softly to your baby before you touch him/her

Place your hands around your baby's head, bottom and/or feet

Hold your baby's hand.

Avoid light touch and stroking as very small babies don't like this.

Let your baby hold your finger.

Kangaroo Care (skin-to-skin holding) is recommended at this stage if the staff feel that your baby is ready for this and you feel ready to start.

Feeding

You may start to notice your baby sucking on their fingers. They may be ready to suck a dummy during tube feeds.

Feeding will be through a tube from babies nose or mouth to their tummy called a nasogastric (NG) / orogastric (OG) tube, or through an intravenous line (IV), a fine tube into the blood stream. This is because your baby has not developed a mature sucking, swallowing and breathing pattern

- **What you can do to help**

Begin collecting your breast milk as soon as you can so that it is ready for your baby as soon as they are ready. Providing breast milk is one of the best things you can do for your baby.

Sleeping

It may be quite difficult to tell whether your baby is awake or asleep. They may be moving but will mostly be quiet and still.

- **What you can do to help**

Let your baby have periods of undisturbed sleep. Try not to wake your baby if they appear to be sleeping. Protect your baby's eyes from the light and try to avoid loud noise. Your baby will like to hear your voice if you speak softly.

Positioning

Because your baby is so small they will have difficulty controlling movements. This is tiring and uses up energy.

- **What you can do to help**

Your baby needs to have their hands close to their face and their legs curled up – like they were in the womb.

Your baby should have a deep boundary around them so that they can have something to snuggle into. This can be a rolled blanket, a “bumper” and/or a fabric “nest”. Your baby will settle and rest better if they are well-positioned.

You can start by helping the nurse when they change your baby's position and, when you feel confident, you will be able to do it yourself.

Nappy changing /Cares

Nappy changing and cares can be disturbing for babies of this gestation.

- **What you can do to help**

Try to provide a boundary when you change your baby's nappy

Move your baby gently and slowly. Hold your baby's feet together, soles touching. Fold the legs rather than lifting.

Provide still holding and a quiet voice. Be prepared to stop if your baby looks stressed.

The nurses will show you how to gently wash your baby, change their nappy and clean their mouth using breast milk if possible or sterile water.

Social

Your baby will not be ready for social interaction yet. They will have limited energy reserves and need to rest as much as possible.

- **What you can do to help**

Allow your baby as much peace and quiet as possible.

Provide still holding and a quiet voice. Be prepared to stop if your baby looks stressed.

Be patient and watch your baby. Observe when they are calm and when they appear to need rest. You will soon learn to recognise your baby's individual cues. Don't rely on the monitors – learn to understand your baby!

For more information see the Bliss Baby Charity website at:-

www.bliss.org.uk

or phone 0500 618140

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