

Patient Information Leaflet

Supporting your baby's development

32-36 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 frightening 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 adapt to their new surroundings. These surroundings affect their behaviour and development and it is important that you recognise how your baby reacts and how you can help their development to progress.

Your baby is 32-36 weeks gestation (about 4 – 8 weeks early)

At this age your baby's senses are 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

Your baby's movements will be quite smooth with few jerks and tremors. They will be able to tuck in arms and legs. Movements may become disorganised if they are upset. They may still find being undressed distressing but your baby will be increasingly tolerant to touch.

- **What you can do to help**

Speak softly to your baby before you touch them.

Hold your baby still rather than rocking them.

Try not to stroke as very small babies often don't like this. Keep your baby's arms and legs tucked in when you move them.

Kangaroo Care is recommended at this age if the staff feels that your baby is ready for this and you feel ready to start.

Feeding

Your baby will often be waking up before a feed is due. Suck and swallowing will be becoming co-ordinated. Your baby will probably be starting to feed from your breast or from a bottle, but may still need some feeds through a tube. They will be ready to suck a dummy during tube feeds. Hold your baby while they are being tube-fed.

- **What you can do to help**

It is really important to 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.

Continue expressing if your baby is not able to take all feeds from the breast or bottle.

If your baby is bottle fed keep them wrapped in a light blanket. Shield your baby's eyes from bright lights and try to feed in a calm, quiet environment.

When “winding” your baby avoid excessive patting on the back.

Watch your baby’s cues while breast or bottle feeding and give them time to coordinate suck-swallow-breathe

Try to avoid care giving, such as nappy changing immediately before a feed as this can tire your baby and make feeding more difficult.

Do Kangaroo Care as often and for as long as possible as this may help your milk supply.

Sleeping

It is generally easy to tell if your baby is awake or asleep. Your baby will start to show brief “alert” periods.

- **What you can do to help**

Let your baby have periods of undisturbed sleep Try not to wake them if they appear to be sleeping

Protect your baby’s eyes from the light and try to avoid loud noise.

Your baby will have increasing awake periods. Try to do cares and interact with your baby during these awake periods.

Positioning

Your baby’s movements are generally smooth. He/she can stretch arms and legs. He/she may still some support keeping limbs close to the body.

- **What you can do to help**

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

Move your baby slowly and avoid sudden movements.

Your baby should have a nice deep boundary around him/her so that they can have something to stretch against. This boundary may be a rolled blanket, a “bumper” and/or a fabric “nest”. Your baby will settle and rest better if he/she is well positioned.

When your baby is laying on their side leave a gap in the boundary near to his/her face so that he/she can “look” out.

Nappy changing/Cares

Nappy changing can be disturbing for babies of this gestation. Your baby may be ready for their first bath.

- **What you can do to help**

Try to avoid care giving, such as nappy changing immediately before a feed as this can tire your baby and make feeding more difficult.

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

Move your baby gently and slowly and don’t lift their legs too high.

Your baby may cope better with bathing if they are wrapped and placed gently into warm water (Swaddled bathing). Ask your baby’s nurse to show you what to do. You should be able to do your baby’s first bath as this is a special occasion.

Social

Your baby may be ready for some social interaction. They may begin to briefly alert or “still” when he your voice. If your baby’s eyes are shaded from the light they may briefly “look” at you.

- **What you can do to help**

Allow your baby as much peace and quiet as possible.

Talk to your baby when they are awake. You may like to sing or read from a book to them.

Keep still if your baby is looking at you as they may find it difficult to follow a moving object.

Be patient and watch your baby 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 tel.0500 618140

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