

Patient Information Leaflet

Supporting your baby's development

36-40 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.

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 36-40 weeks gestation (about close to term)

Care for your baby will be gentle. Your baby needs quiet and protection from bright light because the senses are developing and are not quite mature.

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. Your baby's skin may be sensitive but they will like to be held.

- **What you can do to help**

Speak softly to your baby before you touch them.

Your baby may enjoy rhythmic stroking or some gentle rocking too and fro. Avoid abrupt changes in position.

Keep your baby's arms and legs tucked in when you move him/her.

Kangaroo Care(Skin-to-skin) is recommended at this age if the staff feel 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 may be able to take all feeds from your breast or from a bottle (some babies may still need some feeds through a tube. They will be ready to suck a dummy during tube feeds. Hold your baby while he/she is 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 he/she is ready. 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 light.

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

Your baby will have periods of deep and light sleep with some awake periods. At this stage your baby will cry robustly. Your baby will generally be placed to sleep on their back. Your baby may begin to sleep for longer periods at night.

- **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 like to hear your voice if you speak softly.

Try to do cares and interact with your baby during these alert periods

Positioning

Your baby's movements are generally smooth. They can stretch their arms and legs. Your baby may still need 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.

Your baby should be positioned on their back when asleep.

Your baby may enjoy short periods in a baby seat. Some time on their tummy when they are awake will help their development.

Nappy changing/Cares

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

- **What you can do to help**

Provide support when you change your baby's nappy.

Avoid lifting your baby's legs high.

Your baby may cope best with bathing if he/she is wrapped and placed gently into warm water (Swaddled bathing)for the first two or three baths.

Social

Your baby may now be ready for some social interaction. He/she may begin to alert or "still" when he your voice. If his/her eyes are shaded from the light he/she may 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. Move your head slowly as your baby is looking at you as they will begin to follow a moving object.

Your baby will like to be held close and they may snuggle in to your body.

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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