



Developmental care in the NICU

Welcome to the newborn intensive care unit at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. We strive to make your baby as comfortable as possible from the day of his arrival to the day that he leaves. We have an occupational therapist and a physical therapist on staff to help support the growth and development of your little one. Below are some recommendations that will help you understand your baby's developmental needs.



We try to make the transition to the NICU as smooth as possible for your baby. Before she was born, she was used to a very quiet, dark environment where all sounds and lights were filtered by the uterine wall. She was calmed by the firm boundaries of the uterus, while experiencing slow rocking in your belly.

When babies leave this controlled environment they need some time to adjust to their new world. The staff in the NICU is highly trained in how to make the transition easier while promoting your baby's comfort and providing the very best medical care.

Here are some things that you can do to help:

If your baby is **under 34 weeks gestation**

1. Keep your baby's environment dark. If he is in an isolette and does not have phototherapy, you can bring in a dark blanket to cover the isolette. This will allow him to sleep better.
2. Keep it as quiet as possible. Talk softly to her. She doesn't like loud noises or more than one person talking at once. Some parents choose to bring in heartbeat sounds that can help to calm a baby. She will enjoy music a little later.
3. Let him sleep in between his care times. The best time to interact with him is during care times. Sleep is very important to help your baby grow.
4. When you touch your baby, give her firm touches and boundaries. She does not like light touches or stroking. Just place your hands on her head, belly, or legs to let her know she is safe and that you are there. Bring her hands together and by her face to calm her.

If your baby is **34 weeks gestation or older**

Between 34 and 37 weeks, most babies go through a 'personality change.' They are more awake, interactive, and may be ready to play with you. Each baby achieves this

readiness at a different time. When your baby is ready, your nurse, occupational therapist, or physical therapist will recommend activities for you.

1. All babies (with very few exceptions) will transition to sleeping solely on their backs. This is the safest sleep position for your baby. When you are at home, if your baby falls asleep on his side or belly, please turn him onto his back. For more information, please talk to your care team. For additional info call the Back to Sleep Campaign at 1-800-505- CRIB (2742).
2. You can begin reading to and playing music for your baby. She will enjoy the sound of your voice. This is a good way to bond with your baby and stimulate speech and language development.
3. Tummy time: When your baby is awake and closely supervised, it is important for him to spend time playing on his belly. This will help him develop the muscles he needs to begin rolling and crawling. Place your baby on a clean, firm surface. Practice several times a day as your baby tolerates. If he falls asleep in this position, turn him over onto his back.
4. Other fun play positions are laying your baby on her side or playing with her in a sitting position. When laying her on her side, place her so she is in a “C” position (back is rounded). In this position, it is easier for her to bring her hands in front of her face and begin using early hand–eye coordination skills.

Placing your baby in a sitting position in a crib or on your lap allows her to socialize more while working on controlling her head and trunk muscles. Help her keep comfortable by bringing her hands together or up by her face and gently supporting her head.

5. Infant seat: At this age babies often enjoy being placed in an infant seat to begin exploring their environment. It lets them see what is around them and allows them to socialize with their caregivers. You do not need to bounce your baby in the chair or use vibration as this can be over-stimulating for some babies.
6. Touch and toys: Your baby will enjoy feeling different textures and surfaces. Toys that incorporate various textures, bright colors, and different sounds encourage early learning. Your baby sees things 8-12 inches from the tip of his nose the best, and he enjoys toys with bright colors or contrasting patterns.

If you have any questions on your baby’s development or would like additional recommendations, we would be happy to meet with you. Please ask your nurse to contact Erin Goldblatt, OTR/L or Stacey Adamson, PT.