

# Supporting your premature baby's development in NICU



the women's  
the royal women's hospital

Every baby is individual and has their own particular needs. By providing sensitive support to your baby while they are in Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), you can help them adjust to the NICU environment. Your baby is growing and developing and there are many things that you as parents can do to support your baby's development.

	Typical development	What we can do to help your baby
Vision	The visual system is the last sensory system to develop. Early on, your baby's eyes may often be closed and when they open, they may be easily over-stimulated by bright light.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cover the incubator when possible.</li> <li>• Protect their eyes from bright light with your hands, soft eye masks or shield with blankets.</li> <li>• Limit visual stimulation, as early on this energy is needed for growth.</li> </ul>
Hearing	Hearing develops early during pregnancy. Your baby will recognise and be comforted by your voice and is likely to be sensitive to loud noises.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak softly to your baby.</li> <li>• Avoid loud noises or speaking across the room.</li> <li>• Cot covers also help to muffle sound.</li> </ul>
Smell	Your baby will recognise your smell and be sensitive to strong smells.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid strong perfumes.</li> <li>• Remove antiseptic substances and other strong smells from the incubator as soon as possible after use.</li> </ul>
Movement and positioning	Your baby is used to being curled up in the womb, which helped to contain their movement. Your baby is still developing control of their movements so at times they may appear jerky.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a nest for your baby so they can curl up and push against it (like being in the womb).</li> <li>• Contain your baby's arms and/or legs during cares or if they become upset.</li> <li>• Try to position your baby's hands together in the middle or near their face.</li> </ul>

	Typical development	What we can do to help your baby
Touch and soothing	At this age, skin is fragile and may be sensitive to touch. Your baby may startle if touched suddenly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk softly to your baby before touching or moving them.</li> <li>• Touch gently but firmly so it is not ticklish.</li> <li>• Warm your hands before touching.</li> <li>• Watch your baby's responses and respond to their needs.</li> </ul>
Communication and behaviour	Babies communicate how they are coping using body language such as movement, posture and facial expressions. Premature or unwell babies may find it difficult to deal with too much stimulation. As your baby gets older, they learn to spend more time awake and calm. This allows for more interaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond supportively to your baby's facial expressions and body language. Handle your baby slowly, provide breaks/pauses during activities, or offer a finger to hold onto.</li> <li>• Allow your baby to have long periods of undisturbed sleep. This is important for their growth and brain development.</li> </ul>

## For more information and advice

If your baby is a patient at the Women's in Parkville, ask your nurse to page a member of the Neonatal Allied Health Team.

## Family Violence Support

### 1800 Respect National Helpline

Support for people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.

1800 737 732 (24-hour support service)

[1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au)

## Do you need an interpreter?



If you need an interpreter, you can ask for one.

Interpreter

**Disclaimer:** This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your or your baby's healthcare needs, you should seek advice from your health professional. The Royal Women's Hospital does not accept any responsibility for loss or damage arising from your reliance on this fact sheet instead of seeing a health professional. If you or your baby require urgent medical attention, please contact your nearest emergency department.  
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