

This information is to help you understand more about your 32 - 36 week premature baby, and help you become more involved in your baby's care and the continuing development of their brain.

Touching and holding

Babies at this stage show an increased tolerance to touch.

- Prepare your baby for touch by speaking in a soft and soothing voice. Place your hands on your baby.
- Touch your baby using continuous gentle pressure on their legs, upper body or head. Avoid stroking, rubbing or poking.
- Use a quiet voice around your baby whilst they sleep.
- Hold your baby still, rather than rocking, so they can gradually become accustomed to position changes.
- When holding your baby while they are in a light sleep, talk to them in a soft voice.
- When moving your hands away from your baby, do so gently and slowly without abrupt movements.
- Kangaroo care is holding your baby next to your chest skin to skin. Liaise with your baby's nurse to arrange a time suitable for both you and your baby.

Feeding

During this stage, your baby might be feeding by a tube inserted down baby's nose (Naso Gastric Tube), and trying some breastfeeds or bottles if not planning to

breastfeed. Baby's suction is not fully developed at this stage and they will often need a top of milk via the tube or bottle. Babies at this gestation are still sleepy so may not wake for feeds. Although some may wake and show they are interested in feeding by turning their heads towards the breast, making sucking sounds or putting their hands up to their mouth. The rhythm of sucking, swallowing and breathing becomes more coordinated during this period of time. At this stage your baby may not be able to finish a whole feed and may fatigue. Your baby may be offered a pacifier and may suck on his/her fingers to self sooth. However sucking a pacifier for long periods of time prior to feeding may deplete energy for feeding.

- Have a kangaroo cuddle with your baby prior to a feed to help baby get ready to feed.
- Provide an opportunity for your baby to smell milk before beginning breastfeeds.
- Reduce care giving for your baby just prior to feeds, such as nappy changing, bathing etc, to avoid tiring your baby. Discuss with the nurse if it is suitable to do cares half way during the feed.
- The environment around your baby should be calm and quiet as possible during feeds.

Sleeping

Sleep states will become clearer as baby ages:

Deep Sleep – no movement

Light Sleep – movement of eyes, mouth and face

Awake – eyes open, relaxed, baby calm. You can now interact with your baby.

[continued]

- It is important to protect sleep. Your baby needs this time for brain development.
- Support periods of rest so that your baby may conserve energy.
- Provide boundaries for your baby's arms, legs, head and feet while sleeping.

Positioning

Your baby can move his/her hands and legs back and forth. They can stretch them and then bring them close to their body but still may need help holding them there.

- Your baby should be positioned with their hands close to their face.
- Repositioning should be performed with slow gentle movements whilst keeping baby well supported, arms and legs tucked in.
- Have boundaries around your baby to maintain a snuggled position and facilitate emerging development of flexion and extension of arms and legs.

Looking, listening and smelling

Your baby can tolerate a variety of low frequency sounds at this age. Your baby may show interest if looking at faces and exploring the environment but needs minimal visual stimulation.

- Let your baby remain sleeping when possible.
- Shield your baby's eyes from all bright or direct light.
- Premature babies can be easily over stimulated.
- Interact with your baby when they are awake.
- Shading your baby's eyes will make it easier for them to look at you.

- Provide opportunities for your baby to look at your face. No toys required.
- Develop a regular pattern of care e.g. feed, nappy change, interaction and sleep.
- When your baby is awake, occasionally expose them to short periods of soft rhythmic sounds, such as reading or talking to them.
- Avoid loud sounds around or within your baby's space.
- Protect your baby from strong odours such as perfume, aftershave, scented lotions or cigarette smoke.

Nappy changing

- Provide boundaries around your baby during nappy changes to keep this from being stressful.
- Move slowly and gently while changing nappies. Avoid lifting their legs too high when changing nappies, instead rotate trunk with flexed knees and hips from side to side.

Bathing

- May be performed by nurses and parents together.
- Amount of time away from a heat source should be minimal.
- Bathing your baby should be carefully considered and performed only when it provides obvious benefits.
- If your baby has a bath, you may assist or complete bathing independently.
- Provide containment to your baby's arms and legs during a bath to keep your baby calm.

If you have further questions or concerns about the care of your baby, please talk to the nurse and medical staff looking after your baby. NICU Direct Dial Number: 04 806 0800

