

Learning About Your Baby: 23 to 26 weeks



I am between 23 to 26 weeks old. I know I am very tiny and there are a lot of things to learn about me and the NICU. You are probably feeling very scared and worried. The more you learn about the NICU and how I am developing, the more comfortable you will start to feel in the NICU. When you are comfortable, I will be more comfortable too!

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ME

My NICU room

My lungs are not fully developed yet. I may have a big machine helping me breathe. I have a hard time staying warm, so I will be in an incubator to help me stay warm.

My sense of touch

I like to be swaddled with your hands. My NICU team calls call this “hand hugs.” You can do this by placing your hands around the back of my head and either my bottom or my feet using gentle pressure. My nurse or neonatal therapist can show you how to do this. I also like firm touch. I don’t like being rubbed, tickled, or lightly stroked because my skin is still very fragile and sensitive to touch. I might even like to hold onto your finger. When the NICU team says I am ready, you can hold me skin-to-skin (sometimes called “kangaroo care”). My NICU team will help you hold me safely.

My movements

My movements are mostly jerks, twitches, and startles. I will try to stretch my arms and legs but I don’t have control over these movements yet. When I am happy, let me stretch and move during my diaper change so I can start to move my body when I am not swaddled. I feel secure and sleep well in a snuggled position.

My hearing

My inner ear finished growing at 22 weeks so I know your voice. However, my hearing is very sensitive, so I like it quiet in my room. Please talk, sing, or hum to me in a quiet soothing voice at my bedside and during diaper changing.

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My smell

My sense of smell developed by 17 weeks. I love the familiar smell of my parents. When my parents hold me skin-to-skin, it helps me feel your touch and experience that familiar smell. Ask your nurse or neonatal therapist if your NICU provides a scent cloth for my bed. Protect me from strong smells like perfumes, lotions, or cigarette smoke.

My eyesight

My eyes are not fully developed yet. I will probably keep them closed for the next week or two. Shield my eyes from bright or direct light. Keep my room lights low. My bed may be covered to protect me from bright light.

My appetite

My stomach is not fully developed. I will get nutrition through an IV at first and then get small amounts of breast milk or formula through my feeding tube. Ask my nurse if I can have my pacifier during my feedings. Most of the time I probably won't want it, but I might want to try now and then. If I push the pacifier out, I am telling you I don't want it in my mouth just yet.

My sleep

I need a lot of sleep. It is best to let me sleep between feedings and other tasks. I do **a lot** of growing when I am asleep.

How you can help care for me

My nurse and neonatal therapist will help you learn to care for me in the NICU. Start by quietly talking to me at first and let me know what you are going to do. Then, slowly add a gentle but firm touch to my body. Move me slowly and gently and provide boundaries around my body during diaper changes. This will help the diaper change be less stressful for me. Help get me back in a secure, snuggled position after changing me so I feel safe. I like to have my hands by my face when possible. That helps me learn to soothe myself. I also like to have my legs curled up as if in the womb. My nurse or therapist can show you how to use the special bedding in my isolette to help me stay snuggled.

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