

# Learning About Your Baby: 33 to 34 weeks



I am between 33 to 34 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 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. The part of my brain that controls my breathing is still immature and doesn't always tell my body to breathe. These periods are called ABDs. A is for apnea. This is when I pause my breathing for too long. B is for bradycardia. This is when my heart rate goes below 100 beats per minute. D is for desaturation. This is when the level of oxygen in my blood goes down. My nurse will help you understand what to do for me when this happens. I also 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 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 that I can start to move my body when I am not swaddled. I feel secure and sleep well in a snuggled position. You will have to help me get back into this snuggled position more frequently since I am getting stronger and wiggle more.

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(continued)

### 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.

### 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, read, sing, or hum to me in a quiet soothing voice at my bedside. It is good for me to hear soothing voice and sound (soft music) for up to 1 ½ to 2 hours each day. I like real voices more than music.

### 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 or lotions.

### My eyesight

My eyes are not fully developed yet. Shield my eyes from bright or direct light. Keep my room with natural light or somewhat dim during the day and darker at night so that I begin to get used to daytime and nighttime lighting. I love to look at your face. I have a hard time following you when you move, so hold still when I am looking at you.

### 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 tube feedings. I might like to suck on my pacifier more frequently now. If I push the pacifier out, I am telling you I don't want it in my mouth.

Learn my communication cues. These tell you when I am stressed or when I am ready to interact. Learn my breathing patterns. All these things will help me do my best when I start to feed by mouth.

### HOW YOU CAN HELP CARE FOR ME

My nurse and neonatal therapist will help you learn to care for me. 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 make the diaper change easier 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 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 help me stay snuggled.

Talk to my nurse or therapist about when I can have a swaddle bath. I love a bath best when you are there to help me. My nurse or therapist will help you with all the NICU equipment.

It is important to watch me closely and learn about me. I "talk" and communicate with you through cues or signals. Sometimes my cues will show you that I am feeling good, ready to interact, and happy. Other times, my cues will tell you that I need a rest or that I am stressed. My nurse and therapist can teach you about my cues. As you learn these cues, you might even find other cues that you can teach my nurse and therapist to watch for. Always remember, I love it when YOU care for me.

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