

Learning About Your Baby: 35 weeks +

I am now over 35 weeks old! I am here earlier than you expected but I also know you are excited to get me home as soon as possible. I am working hard to get home too! This time in the NICU can be so stressful and each week can feel like forever. The more you learn about me, the NICU environment, and how I am developing, the more comfortable you will feel in the NICU.



My sense of touch

I like firm and calming touch. Because my brain and nervous system are immature, I am more sensitive to light wispy touch or tickles. I may like to grasp your finger. My nurse or neonatal therapist can show you how to provide firm and calming touch. I love to be held skin-to-skin by my parents. Hold me as much as possible. My NICU team will help you and other visitors hold me safely.

What You Should Know About Me

My NICU room

I am called a “late preterm” infant. I may look like a small healthy baby, but I am still premature and have a lot of things to do before I am developed enough to go home. I may need oxygen support to help me breathe. It is also hard for me to stay warm when I am this little. At 35 weeks, my brain is still growing and developing. In fact, my brain will grow another one third of it’s size before I’m full term! My brain is also learning to communicate better with my body right now. This will help me handle more complex movement and feeding tasks. For my brain to grow, I need good, deep sleep.

My movements

My movements are mostly jerking, 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 so that I sleep well since I am getting stronger and wiggle more.

My hearing

My hearing is sensitive to loud noises. I know and love to hear your voice. 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) at a few hours each day.

My smell

I love experiencing the familiar smell of my parents. I am sensitive to strong smells like perfumes or lotions. My parents holding me skin-to-skin helps me feel your touch and experience that familiar smell. Hold me frequently.

My eyesight

Shield my eyes from bright or direct light as I am still sensitive to light. Keep my room with natural light during the day and darker at night so that I get used to daytime and nighttime lighting. I love to look at your face. I like to try to follow your face as you move slowly. I see you best when you are about 12 to 18 inches from my face.

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My appetite

My stomach is still immature. If I was just born, I will slowly get used to breast milk or formula in my stomach or I may initially get nutrition through an IV. I love to suck on my pacifier to help me self-soothe. Sucking on my pacifier doesn't always mean that I am hungry. Sucking on my pacifier helps me stay calm and comforted while I am in the NICU and not close to you. However, I also like my pacifier during tube feedings to help me learn to associate sucking with having my tummy get full of good nutrition. If I push my pacifier out of my mouth forcefully, sometimes that means I need a break from sucking and don't want it in my mouth.

Ask my nurse and neonatal therapist about feeding me by mouth. This will likely be my last big hurdle before I can go home. Because I was born early and my body, brain, and breathing are still developing, I am at much higher risk to have both short-term and long-term feeding issues when I am born in this late preterm period. It will take me longer to learn how to eat safely by mouth than if I was born full term. Don't worry, I can get good nutrition from my feeding tube while I'm still growing and developing! My nurse and therapist can help you learn how to support me to learn to eat by either breast or bottle.

- Breastfeeding and bottle feeding will take some time for me to learn. Be patient with me. Some days I will do better than others. That's normal when learning something new.

- Bottle feeding is not any easier than breastfeeding.
- Do you eat well when you are asleep? Neither do I! If I'm too tired to eat, don't try to wake me as that may make me more tired. Let me get good, deep sleep so that my brain keeps growing and developing.
- Learning to coordinate my breathing is the most important thing you can learn about me eating by mouth, whether at breast or bottle. Ask my nurse and therapist what to watch for with my breathing.
- Eating when I am on my side is usually the safest position when I am late preterm. My nurse and therapist can show you how to do this at breast or with a bottle.
- Keeping the room quiet and distractions at a minimum will help me focus on learning to eat when the time is right.
- Learn my feeding cues. I will communicate with you and let you know when I am ready to try to eat and when I need to stop eating.
- Consistency will help me learn.
- Remember, I should love to eat. If I don't seem to enjoy feeding, please ask to talk with my neonatal therapist.

My sleep

I still need a lot of sleep. I will do best if I have a regular routine of cares, feeding, interaction, and then good deep sleep. Talk and interact with me when I am awake. 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 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 and my nurse or therapist will help you with all the NICU equipment.

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 so you can help me. As you learn these cues, you might even find special cues that you can teach my nurse and therapist to watch for so that they can help me best.

Talk to my NICU team about what I need to do in order to go home. Remember to be patient with me, I am small, and these things will take time, but I am working hard to get home to you every day. Most of all, I love when YOU care for me!

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