

Things to do with your baby on Butterfly

Talking and reading

Language is important for your baby's development. Studies show babies in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) hear less words than babies at home. It is important to speak to your baby to help them learn, if you are not sure what to say, try reading a book.



Singing and music

Your voice can be soothing and calming for your baby. Your baby will know your voice and bond to it. Singing can assist with feeding and sleeping which can in turn improve growth and development. It doesn't matter if you think you 'can't' sing, studies have shown babies respond positively no matter what their parents sound like. If you're shy, start by humming.



Positive touch

Babies in NICU experience lots of medical touch but not as much positive touch. Your baby's skin is very sensitive; stroking and light touch can be overstimulating for them. We recommend firm but gentle holding, a hand cupping their feet or head can be a good way to introduce positive touch, it can also help during stressful procedures. Ask your nurse for tips on positive touch for your baby.



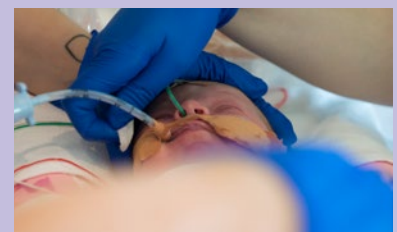
Protecting sleep

It is important that your baby gets undisturbed periods of sleep to grow and develop. During sleep your baby is building their brain. Try to learn your baby's sleep and wake cycles and only disturb them from their sleep to care for them, if necessary. Ask your nurse to help you learn or for more information on sleep states, see the COCOON website.



Cares

Your baby's cares are normally done all together to increase the time your baby is able to have undisturbed sleep. These can include nappy changes, breast milk oral care, eye care, changing saturation probe, temperature check, weights, baths, feeding. These are all things you can be involved in. Ask your nurse to support you in learning these skills.



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Non-nutritive sucking

When your baby is unwell, premature or unable to suck their feed, dummies can help by training a baby's suck-swallow reflex which can help them learn to feed faster. Sucking can also help relieve pain in babies and assist with state organisation in preterm babies. Ask your baby's nurse if they are ready for a dummy.



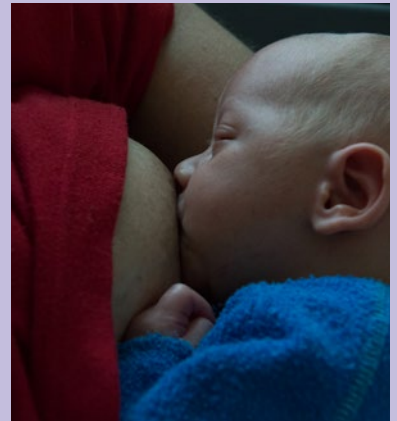
Scent cloth exchange

Your baby's sense of smell develops at about 22 weeks gestation and they are able to recognise your smell. When separated in NICU cloths with a parents scent on them can support sleep, improve response to pain and promote settling behaviours. Parents can also take home scent cloths with the scent of their baby which may help promote parent-baby attachment and increased breast milk production for mothers.



Breast feeding or feeding

Feeding your baby is a special opportunity for connection and closeness. Let your nurse know your intended method of feeding so we can support you in your choice. Breast milk is best for babies. It is made up of unique and individualised antibodies, proteins and minerals that adapt to your baby's needs. Breast milk is the easiest food for your baby to digest, it supports optimal brain development, can reduce risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and conditions such as allergies, asthma and eczema. Ask us about expressing milk for your baby if they are not yet ready to suck feed. If breast milk is not available for your baby or there is a reason that they cannot have it (this is rare), they will be given an infant formula to support their growth and development.



Skin-to-skin care

Is a special way for both mums and dads to hold their baby. Your baby is placed upright on your bare chest wearing only a nappy. Skin-to-skin care, sometimes called kangaroo care, has a range of benefits for both baby and parents. You can ask your nurse if your baby is ready for skin-to-skin cuddles. Babies sense of smell is very strong, so parents should avoid strong perfumes, deodorant or smoking before skin-to-skin.



Developmental opportunities

Even though your baby is in hospital, as they grow and recover you can provide many different developmental opportunities. Ask staff about tummy time, music therapy, practicing going in the pram, sitting up in a chair.

