

# NEONATAL INTENSIVE CARE UNIT

Parent Handbook



St. Thomas Elgin  
General Hospital

## About the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

Babies are admitted to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for specialized medical and nursing care. Our goal is to provide your baby with the best possible care so that he or she can be discharged home as soon as possible.

During the first few hours of life, your baby may need different treatments and tests. These tests will vary depending on the complications your baby may have.

Being separated from your new baby is difficult. Understanding your baby's needs will help you get through this difficult time. Your baby's health care team will help you to understand why your baby needs special care. The better informed that you are about what is happening with your baby, the more comfortable you will be in the NICU.

The NICU is a level 2 hospital, which means your baby is medically stable, but may still need temporary breathing support or low flow oxygen. Babies in the NICU have begun to take and tolerate feeds (either by tube or by mouth), but may still have an IV.



## About the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit cont.

Our first priority is the care and health of your family. We want to work with you to meet your baby's needs. Please ask questions and discuss concerns with your baby's nurse or doctor.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, staff in our Women and Children's unit are always available to support you and your family. You can also access other resources to help you - a social worker, public health nurse, your midwife or your spiritual advisor.

Your health care team at STEGH is made up of specialized people who will care for your baby. All members of the team will work together with you and your family to create a plan that will provide your baby with the best possible care.





### Contact the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

You are encouraged to call the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit anytime during the day or night if you have questions or concerns about your baby:

**519-631-2030, Ext. 2214.**



### Visiting the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

We value family-centered care and involve parents in the care of their baby while in hospital. Your NICU team will involve you in feeding, bathing, and changing your baby as soon as possible.

Early parental involvement promotes bonding, improves parental self-esteem, and increases the incidence and duration of lactation (production of breast milk).

We encourage you to visit as much as possible. Your visits will help you and your baby get to know each other.

We recognize that family members and friends provide parental support, and encourage short visits. Please ensure your visitors are accompanied by a parent. Siblings and other children are allowed to visit as long as they are properly supervised, vaccinated, and infection free.

If a family member will be visiting your baby without you, their name needs to be documented in your baby's chart.





## Visiting Guidelines

- Everyone entering the NICU will be required to wash their hands.
- If your baby or another infant in the room requires specialized care, or if the health care team is discussing other infants, you may be asked to wait in the waiting room.
- Entrance to the NICU may be denied at any time related to the care of the infants in the Unit.
- Visitors must respect the privacy of other families; do not wander to other bedsides or ask questions about other babies or families.

Premature infants need rest and time to grow. Short visits at the bedside are encouraged.



## Keeping your baby safe

Babies in the NICU can get infections very easily. Infections may have long-term effects, and can delay the baby's stay in hospital.

Please do not visit if you have:

- a cough, sore throat, runny nose or fever
- a rash or weeping cold sores
- diarrhea
- pink eye
- measles or mumps
- chicken pox
- flu-like symptoms or vomiting

If a family member or guest has been exposed to chicken pox, mumps, measles whooping cough or any other childhood illness within the last 14 days, please refrain from visiting the NICU.

It is your responsibility to ensure that your visitors (including siblings) are free from colds, flu or other illnesses.



## Understanding the equipment in the NICU

The equipment and alarms that you hear may make you anxious. The following outlines some of the equipment used in the NICU.

### Isolettes

- Incubators used for premature or newborn infants
- Temperature in the incubator is controlled to keep your baby's body temperature where it should be
- Health care team is able to care for your baby through holes in the sides of the incubator

### Monitors

- Allow the health care team to keep track of your baby's vital signs (temperature, blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing)
- Equipped with alarms to signal an increase or decrease from the normal range; the alarm may also sound if your baby is active

### Intravenous (IV's)

- Thin, bendable tube that goes into a vein to give medicines and fluids
- Allow some medicines to be given in small amounts around-the-clock instead of giving your baby shots every few hours
- Treatment with an IV may be called a "drip" or "infusion"



## Understanding the equipment in the NICU cont.

### CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure)

- Used in babies who are breathing well enough on their own that they do not need mechanical ventilation
- Nasal CPAP is given by small prongs or a mask that fits your baby's nose
- Provides small amounts of pressure to inflate your baby's lungs; may also provide oxygen

### Phototherapy

- 80 per cent of premature infants (and many term infants) will develop jaundice - an increase of bilirubin in the blood that causes the skin (and sometimes the eyes) to turn yellow
- Jaundice is treated with lights that are placed over or below your baby to break down the bilirubin at the skin level
- Your baby's eyes will be covered with eye patches to protect them





## Baby Care in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit



### Kangaroo Care

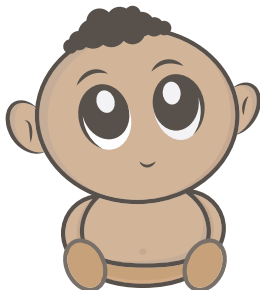
Kangaroo Care is a method of holding your baby that involves skin-to-skin contact. Your baby is placed on your chest next to your skin beneath your clothing. Your baby listens to your heartbeat and enjoys the warmth of your skin. Both mothers and fathers can provide Kangaroo Care.



### Feeding your baby

It is normal for premature babies to have difficulty feeding. Sometimes babies can only do one thing at a time. If your baby is having problems feeding you might try:

- Decreasing noise and avoiding talking while feeding
- Not rocking (if in a rocking chair)
- Holding your baby upright
- Holding your baby face to face



### Caring for your baby's skin

The skin of a premature baby is very fragile. It feels and looks dry; that is normal. To protect your baby's skin:

- Check your baby's diaper often; if it is wet or has stool, change it
- Use a soft cloth with water for cleaning your baby's bottom
- Avoid using perfumed lotions or baby powder
- Don't use the diaper to wipe off the stool; the diaper is rough



## Baby Care in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

### Reading your baby's signals

Even though babies cannot talk, they can communicate. Your baby can tell you when it is time to stop feeding or time to rest or sleep. Signals to look for:



- Looking away from you
- Hands spread apart, giving you a “stop” sign
- Hiccuping or yawning frequently
- Shutting down; becoming limp

Delivering a premature baby can be a frightening experience. Spending time caring for your baby is the best thing you can do. This will help you feel comfortable caring for your baby before you go home. Each day you will learn more about your baby.

The health care team in the NICU creates an environment that supports your baby's growth and development. This includes keeping the noise level low, dimming the lights when possible, covering isolettes to help babies get to sleep, trying not to disturb them when they are sleeping, and using rolls and blankets to keep their arms and legs close to their bodies for comfort. Sleep time is very important to help babies grow and recover from illness.

The health care team also tries to “cluster” their care around feedings and will ask that you schedule your visits and cuddling times around your baby's feedings. This will promote growth and development and provide undisturbed sleep periods for your baby.



## Discharge Planning

The length of time that your baby will stay in the NICU will depend on the reason for admission and the gestational age of your baby at birth. There is no specific weight requirement for discharge from the NICU. The criteria for discharge includes: the baby taking all its feeds by mouth (breast or bottle), continuous weight gain, and lack of spells. This generally comes together for babies around the original due date. You will be given the dates of any follow up appointments that your baby may need, such as a special infant clinic, RSV clinic and eye clinic. We will provide you and your family doctor with a copy of the discharge information. When baby is close to going home, a date will be arranged for you to stay in our Care by Parent Suite.

## Care by Parent Suite

Prior to discharge (24-48 hours), you will stay in our Care by Parent Suite. This Suite is a room where you will have your baby with you at all times. Parents are expected to provide all care for their baby, with the support of the nurses from the NICU. This is an opportunity for parents to spend time with their baby alone and to get to know their baby's cues prior to going home.



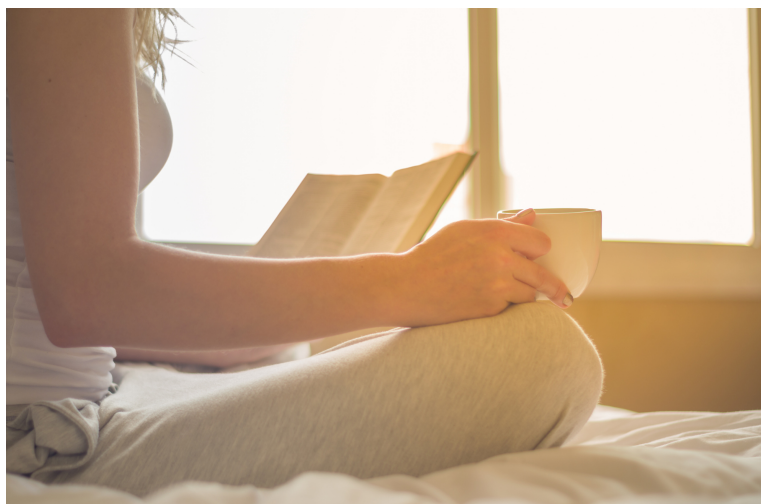
## How Can I Feel Less Stressed?

Having a baby in the NICU can be one of the most stressful times in your life. You may be away from your support circle, such as friends, family, and other children. Your life may seem like it's been turned upside down as you wait for the day when your baby is ready to go home with you.

As hard as it can be, it's important to keep things as normal as possible. These tips can help:

- Pay attention to your own needs and those of the rest of your family, especially any other kids. Doing something for yourself can be as simple as taking a relaxing bath, going for a walk, or reading a favorite book.
- Make plans for a weekly family activity, and sit down together and talk about how this experience makes you feel.
- Turn to other parents whose babies are in the NICU for support. They'll know better than anyone what you're feeling. Join a support group to share your feelings, worries, and triumphs together.

When you take care of yourself, you'll be more rested and better able to take care of and get to know your baby. While a stay in the NICU can be hard, it's also rewarding to watch your little one grow stronger each day.



**If you are feeling overwhelmed or need additional support during this time, talk to a member of your health care team.**