



## IF YOUR BABY NEEDS SPECIAL CARE AFTER BIRTH

### ABSTRACT

Learn what it means when a newborn baby needs special care in the NICU after birth. This guide explains common reasons for NICU admission, including premature birth and medical concerns, what parents can expect from the care team, helpful questions to ask, and ways to support your baby while caring for your own emotional well-being.

Rachael Quigley, Content Manager  
Product & UX Content

Pregnancy<sup>+</sup>



## If your baby needs special care after birth

If your baby needs to go to the NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) after birth, it can feel scary and overwhelming, especially if it was unexpected. You may have questions about why your baby is there, what happens next, and how you can help. This guide explains what the NICU is, why some newborns need extra care, and how you and your support people can stay involved.

### What is the NICU?

The NICU is a special area of the hospital for newborn babies who need extra medical support. Some babies stay for only a few hours or days, while others may need care for weeks or longer. NICU doctors, nurses, and specialists monitor babies closely and provide care around the clock.

### Why do babies go to the NICU?

A baby may need NICU care for many reasons, including if they:

- Are born early, before 37 weeks of pregnancy.
- Have a birth defect or health condition that needs closer monitoring or treatment.
- Have trouble breathing, signs of infection, feeding challenges, jaundice, or another concern that needs extra care.

Not every baby with one of these concerns needs the NICU. Your baby's care team can explain why NICU care is recommended and what they will be watching for.

### Who goes with the baby to the NICU?

Sometimes, the baby's mom or birthing parent is still recovering after delivery and may not be able to visit the NICU right away. A partner, parent, family member, or adoptive parent may be the first person to go with the baby or speak with the care team. If you are visiting on behalf of the baby's parent, ask what information you can share and write down anything important, so it's easier to pass along.

Hospital staff may need permission from the baby's parent or legal guardian before sharing medical details. These privacy rules are in place to protect your family's information.

Here are a few helpful questions to ask the NICU team:

- What are my baby's main health concerns right now?
- What can I do to help?
- Can I touch, hold, feed, or take a photo of my baby?
- What information can I share with the baby's parent or legal guardian?
- How can I stay in touch with the NICU staff?

## What emotions do NICU parents feel?

Having a baby in the NICU can bring up many emotions at once, including fear, sadness, guilt, anger, hope, and relief. Try to give yourself time to take in what is happening. Ask questions when you need to, lean on people you trust, and let the care team know how you are doing. Your well-being matters too, and caring for yourself can help you be there for your baby.

### +++++SOURCES+++++

- March of Dimes. Available at: [<https://www.marchofdimes.org/>](<https://www.marchofdimes.org/>) (Accessed May 15, 2025).