

After Your Baby Leaves the NICU

The first 4 months

This handout explains basic skills your baby will be learning in the first few months after you leave the NICU.

Why do we need this handout?

Babies born preterm (more than 3 weeks early) often need extra support after they leave the NICU. They may need help learning skills such as eating, moving, talking, and playing. The kind of help each child needs is unique.

Full-term babies who needed NICU care also may have challenges during this time. Talk with your baby's healthcare providers and therapists about any concerns you have about your child.

What is included in this handout?

This handout is a basic guide for your baby's first 4 months. It includes:

- Typical stages in a baby's feeding skills, language skills, movement skills, and sensory skills
- Common signs for concern
- Tips and toys to help your baby develop skills
- Resources to find a therapist who can help you care for your baby at home

We hope that you find this handout helpful. Please call us at 206.598.4606 and ask to talk with a developmental therapist if you have questions or concerns.



Talk with your pediatrician if you have any concerns about your baby.

Feeding and Nutrition for 0 to 4 Months Corrected Age

Typical Feeding

Breastmilk or formula feedings, or both:

- Feedings usually last about 15 minutes or less, and no longer than 20 to 30 minutes.
- Both parent and baby enjoy feedings

Typical Intake

Intake may be based on your baby's plan with a nutritionist. Here are usual amounts babies eat:

- **0 to 1 month, corrected age:** 6 to 8 feeds a day, 2 to 5 oz. of breast milk or formula at each feed
- **1 to 2 months, corrected age:** 5 to 7 feeds a day, 3 to 6 oz. of breast milk or formula at each feed
- **2 to 3 months, corrected age:** 4 to 7 feeds a day, 4 to 7 oz. of breast milk or formula at each feed
- **3 to 4 months, corrected age:** 4 to 6 feeds a day, 6 to 8 oz. of breast milk or formula at each feed

Common Signs for Concern

- Parent or baby does not enjoy feeding times
- It takes longer than 30 minutes to finish feeding
- Baby coughs, chokes, or gags during feeds
- Milk or formula dribbles out of baby's mouth while feeding
- Baby seems uncomfortable during or after feeds
- Baby has little or no interest in breast or bottle, does not seem hungry
- Baby starts to eat but then stops, pushes away, and will not finish feed
- Baby opens mouth to start feed, but doesn't suck
- Baby's breathing sounds wet, or there is congestion or lung problems
- Baby has sudden changes in eating patterns, or has problems eating
- Baby does not easily move to solid foods by 8 months corrected age
- Baby breathes hard during feed, or pauses or stops breathing
- Baby is sick often, but no one else in the family is sick
- Baby spits up and seems to be uncomfortable or in pain
- Baby is not gaining weight well

If You Have Feeding Concerns

- Talk with your baby's provider about your concerns as soon as you can.
- Ask your baby's provider to refer you to an infant feeding therapist.
- If you have questions or need help finding a feeding therapist in your area, please call UWMC's feeding therapist at 206.598.4606.
- Take the questionnaire on the Feeding Matters website at www.feedingmatters.org:
 - Under "Does Your Child Have Feeding Struggles?" click on "Take our questionnaire."
 - You can print your results to share with your baby's provider or feeding therapist.



It is typical for babies to make eye contact and to smile and laugh.

Language Skills for 0 to 4 Months Corrected Age

Typical Development

- Makes eye contact and keeps eye contact with you
- Responds to sounds and voices
- Cries to get attention
- Shows feelings through changes in tone of voice or cry
- Coos during play with parent
- Smiles and laughs
- Shows increased excitement around people

Common Signs for Concern

- Does not make or keep eye contact
- Does not respond to sounds, parent's voice
- Likes objects more than people
- Does not coo, smile, laugh, or change the tone of voice or cry

Movement Skills for 0 to 4 Months Corrected Age

Typical Development

- Holds head straight, turns head to left and right equally
- Able to lie on tummy, pushes with arms into floor or other surface during tummy time
- Rests with arms and legs relaxed, hands are usually open
- Moves arms and kicks legs in all different ways
- Looks at hands, brings hands to mouth, and clasps hands together
- Slowly learns to lift head up when on tummy, does not arch backward
- Starts reaching for toys held at or above chest, tucks legs up, starts reaching hands toward knees

Common Signs for Concern

- Holds head to one side (rotated or tilted)
- Prefers to turn head to only one side
- Does not like tummy time
- Often arches back and neck (pulls backward), holds arms behind body
- Pushes or holds legs straight, “likes to stand,” or “feels really strong”
- Lifts arms and legs off the surface or arches back when placed on tummy
- Baby’s body feels “floppy”
- Does not move much without your help
- Needs lots of support to hold head steady or does not lift head
- Moves one side of the body, or one arm or leg more or in different ways than the other side
- Only kicks legs together at the same time, does not alternate legs kicking
- Holds hands in fists, does not reach for toys, or holds one or both arms tucked into body
- Stiff, jerky motions with arms and legs
- Surprises you by doing advanced skills like rolling over or standing

Sensory Skills for 0 to 4 Months Corrected Age

Typical Development

- Baby may need your help to soothe or stay calm
- Baby responds to you and calms most of the time when you help
- Baby is happy or content in most places, whether in a quiet house or a busy store
- Baby can sleep soundly, at regular times, and for a few hours at a time
- Baby responds to changes in light, sounds, touch, motion, and smells

Common Signs for Concern

- Baby often has a hard time sleeping
- Baby has a hard time calming, or cannot calm with anyone other than a primary caregiver
- Caregivers often do not know how to get baby to calm
- Baby fusses in busy places where there are lots of people or sounds
- Baby fusses when moving
- Baby's head tips back when leaning back or to the side
- Baby fusses when touching or mouthing different textures



Young babies are very interested in faces, people, and lights.

Helpful Toys and Activities

For 0 to 2 Months Corrected Age

Babies do not need many toys in the first 2 months. Your baby will be:

- Very interested in faces, people, and lights
- Very interested in hearing you talk, read, and sing
- Most interested in toys or pictures in black and white or with strong color contrasts (dark and light colors)

For 2 to 4 Months Corrected Age

Starting at 2 months, babies start being more interested in toys. They often reach and grab for them. They enjoy:

- Thin rings and rattles that are easy for their small hands to grab
- Toys they can suck on, mouth, chew without choking
- Toys with many different textures
- Toys that make sounds, light up, or vibrate when baby touches, shakes, or bites the toy



Talk with your baby's provider if you have any concerns about your baby's development.

If You Have Any Developmental Concerns

- Tell your baby's healthcare provider if you have concerns.
- Ask your baby's provider for a referral to a pediatric therapist who can assess your baby's skills.
- You can also self-refer your child to *early intervention services* (see "What are early intervention services?" below).
- Call our NICU therapy team at 206.598.4606 to talk about your concerns. We can help you find local resources to help.

What are early intervention services?

Early intervention services help families with children up to 3 years old who have delays or differences in their development.

You do **not** need a doctor's referral to have your child assessed by early intervention services. These services may help you:

- Find the best resources for your child
- Understand your child's development
- Support your child's learning and growth

How do I find these services?

If you live:

- In **Washington state**, call Within Reach at 800.322.2588
- In **Alaska**, visit <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dsds/pages/infantlearning>
- In **Idaho**, visit www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/?TabId=78
- In **Montana**, visit www.dphhs.mt.gov/dsd/homebasedservicesstofamilies/earlyinterventionservices.shtml and click on "Developmental Disabilities Program"

Questions?

If there is something you do not understand, please ask questions. Every question you ask is important!

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit:
206.598.4606