

Helping Your Baby Calm

What you can do

Your baby is starting to learn how to stay calm, and will need your help to do this while they are in the NICU. To help your baby calm:

- First, observe your baby to see what state your baby is in.
- Then, choose how to interact based on that state.

(See the handout “Your Baby’s Sleep and Wake States.”)

Things to Remember

When you are with your baby, remember to:

Time your interactions carefully.

Interrupting your baby’s sleep time can delay healing and development. Because of this, we will group the times when we need to interact with your baby as much as we can. We call this “clustering” care.

Clustering care means that your baby will have long rest times without being awakened. This will help your baby’s healing and growth.

We suggest that you also time your interactions with your baby around the times when we are caring for them.

Watch for your baby’s stress cues.

It is very important to know when your baby is feeling stress. Try to see what is causing the stress. Look around at what is going on. Triggers may be lights, noises, talking, touch, movement, or your baby’s position. (See the handout “Caring for Your Baby” for a list of cues that may mean your baby is stressed.)

Give your baby a “time-out” when you see signs of stress.

Babies in the NICU usually get stressed when there is too much going on around them. When your baby is stressed, we give them a “time-out.” To do this, we reduce things that may be bothering them. We stop talking, dim the lights, stop moving, and do other things to help them calm.



Your baby will show you when they feel stress and when they are ready to interact.

Positive Touch

Touching a very young baby can be over-stimulating if it is not done in the right way. But the way you touch and hold your baby can also help calm them.

“Positive touch” is a way of touching your baby to help them calm. This type of touch helps your baby feel more safe and secure, much like they felt in the uterus. When a baby is calm, they are more able to open their eyes and interact.

There are 2 types of positive touch you can use to help your baby calm:

- Still touch
- Containment

Still Touch

To use still touch, lightly but firmly place your hand on your baby so they feel your presence. This is a perfect way to start all interactions with your baby.

With still touch, be sure that:

- Your touch is gentle but firm, still, and consistent
- Your touch is not light or uncertain
- Your hands are not moving and your fingers are not stroking

Containment

Containment is like still touch in many ways. You will use your hands or soft positioning devices to hold your baby in the fetal position. This means that your baby’s arms and legs are held toward the center of their body, and their head is *in midline* (not rotated to one side or arched backward).

When your baby’s body is in the fetal position, your baby will feel safer and more secure, which will help calm them. The more contact there is between your hands and your baby’s body, the more calming it will be.

With containment, make sure that:

- Your baby’s head is in midline
- Your baby’s hands are close to their chest or chin, and that their shoulders are rounded
- Your baby’s hips and legs are tucked up toward their body
- Your hands and fingers hold very still once you get into this containment position

Other Ways to Calm Your Baby

- **Kangaroo care:** If your baby is stable enough to be held, ask your nurse how to do “kangaroo care.” In this calming method, the baby lies on their tummy on their mom or dad’s chest, skin to skin. This position will likely be very calming to them. It also helps bonding between parent and child.
- **Dim light:** Bright light can be overwhelming to babies. Dimming the lights in the room or shading your baby’s eyes may help increase their interaction with you.
- **Quiet surroundings:** Even noises that do not sound loud to you can be stressful for your baby. Watch how your baby responds to noise and reduce those sounds that seem stressful to them. Sometimes even soft voices can be too much for a very young baby.
- **Smelling mom:** Place something in your baby’s bed that smells like mom. Mom’s smell can help calm a baby and help them feel safe. It can also help build your baby’s attachment to you when they are not yet ready to be held.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

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