

Learning to Move

When your baby is premature

Premature babies can have a hard time learning to coordinate their movements. The motor therapists in the NICU are watching your baby closely, and working to teach your baby to move. Talk with your baby's therapist about how you can help your baby learn to move.

Here are some challenges that many premature babies share:

Midline

Babies in the NICU often have trouble holding their head lined up with the center of their bodies (the midline). They also have a hard time lifting their arms and legs against gravity.

To help these babies, we use positioning aids and swaddle them into midline positions during rest times. We avoid letting these babies arch backward or extend their arms and legs out wide.

Arching Backward

Premature babies often arch backward instead of curling forward. When this happens too much, the baby's back muscles become very strong, and the tummy muscles can stay very weak.

If back and tummy muscles are not equally strong, the baby may have trouble later when it is time to learn motor skills like sitting, crawling, and walking. Even if your baby seems to enjoy arching backward, it is important that we help your baby learn to bend forward, too.

Stiffness

NICU babies may stretch out their legs or arms and hold them stiff. It may seem like the baby is very strong, but it can mean they are having trouble relaxing their limbs.



Talk with your nurse if you have any questions about how your baby moves.

If your baby seems to have stiff legs or arms, talk with your nurse or a therapist about how you can help your baby learn to relax. This will make a big difference in motor development later on.

Limited Motion

Babies need to move their arms and legs in all different directions and patterns. When they make these random motions, babies are actually learning how to move their bodies. This helps them later when they need to learn to do things like reach, roll, and crawl.

If your baby seems to kick or move their arms in the same ways over and over, they could be missing out on the variety of motions they should be learning. Talk with a therapist about how your baby is moving, and how you can help your baby learn to do different types of motion.

Questions?

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

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit:
206.598.4606