

When Can My Baby Come Home?

Planning for discharge

This handout explains what needs to be in place before your baby is ready to go home:

- *What your baby must be able to do physically*
- *What you need to learn about caring for your baby*
- *How to prepare yourself for taking your baby home*

Discharge Planning

The first thing many NICU families want to know is, “When can we go home?” *Discharge planning* is a process we will do together. We want to make sure you and your baby are as prepared as you can be to go home.

Your Baby’s Health

Before it is safe for your baby to leave the hospital, your baby must:

- Be gaining weight regularly.
- Have a safe feeding plan with no breathing problems.
- Be able to maintain a normal body temperature when in an open crib.
- Not have needed stimulation after episodes of apnea, bradycardia, and deaturation (ABDs) for a certain length of time. The length of time will be based on your baby’s unique needs. Please talk with your baby’s care team about this.



Your baby is getting close to being able to go home when gaining enough weight.

Some NICU babies can go home even if they still need breathing or feeding support. We will talk with you if this might be true for your baby.

Tests and Treatments

When your baby has met the criteria listed above, your baby’s care team will decide if more tests or treatments are needed before your baby can leave the hospital. Their decisions will be based on how prematurely your



"I think families often reach a point in their NICU stay when they can see the finish line but can't quite get there. We had learned to care for our daughter, knew her noises and cues, and we wanted her home."

-- Lucy's Mom

baby was born. The care team will talk with you about what tests and treatments are needed.

These tests and treatments may include:

- An eye exam called a *retinopathy of prematurity* (ROP) exam
- A hearing test called a *brainstem auditory evoked response* (BAER) test
- A test called the *angle tolerance test* (ATT) to make sure your baby will be safe sitting in a car seat on the way home
- Immunizations (vaccines)
- Screening and treatment for *respiratory syncytial virus* (RSV)
- Assessing your baby for special home equipment and home care needs

Learning for Parents

The discharge process also involves learning for parents. Your readiness to take your baby home is just as important as your baby's health. This is both for your baby's well-being and for your own.

We encourage you to take part in caring for your baby as soon and as often as you can during your baby's NICU stay. This will help you learn many of the things you need to know to take care of your baby at home.

Getting Ready to Go Home

We have made a "Discharge Checklist" (see page 71) that you can use to keep track of all the steps that need to be done and information you need to know before your baby can go home with you. Everyone who will help you care for your baby at home needs to be ready. Ask your nurse for this checklist if you do not have it already.

References: NANN's *Preparing to Take Your Baby Home: Information for Parents* and Module AAP's *Hospital Discharge of the High Risk Neonate-Proposed Guidelines*

Questions?

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

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