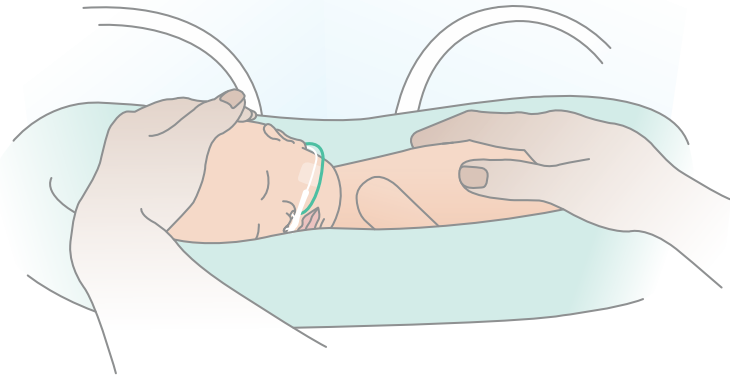


# First Steps for Parents in the Neonatal Unit



Inga Warren  
Illustrations: Hanneke de Wit

[www.earlybabies.com](http://www.earlybabies.com)

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While every effort has been made to ensure the information in this little book is up to date and safe it is important that you check with the healthcare professionals caring for your baby when you follow the guidance in this book. Neither the publisher nor the author can accept liability or responsibility for any loss or damage allegedly arising from information or suggestions herein

Publisher: Early Babies

Author: Inga Warren

Design: Tangram Studio

Illustrations: Hanneke de Wit

# Welcome

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**born on:**

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**son/daughter of:**

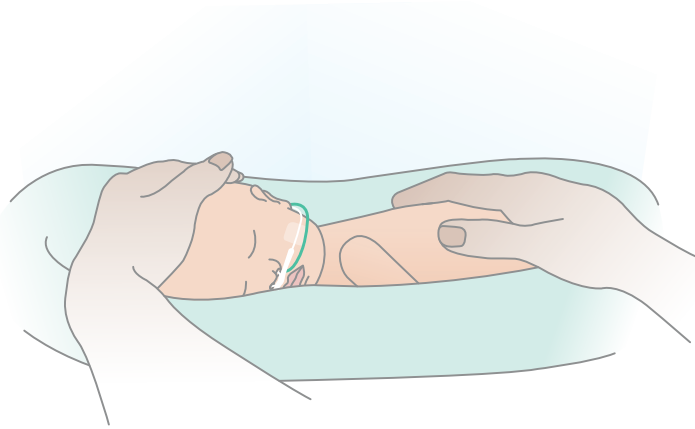
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**brother/sister of:**

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The purpose of this little book is to give you ideas about caring for your baby in the Neonatal Unit in the early days. Getting involved with your baby's care can be scary at first but you will soon get to know your baby and understand better than anyone else how she or he feels.

We hope you will find this a helpful first step to becoming a parent in the Neonatal Unit. You can find much more information to guide you along your journey in "Caring for your Baby in the Neonatal Unit: a Parents' Handbook" available from [www.earlybabies.com](http://www.earlybabies.com)

Always check with the health care professionals responsible for your baby's care when following guidance in this book.

*Inga Warren*

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# Protecting your baby from infection

**Babies in the neonatal unit usually have low immunity to infection and you will want to do everything you can to protect your baby. Here are some tips.**

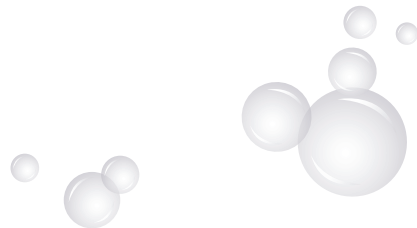
**Hand washing** goes top of the list. Good handwashing is essential. It needs to be thorough and systematic. Follow the step by step guide on page 8.

**Sanitising gel** is an extra precaution after hand washing, after you have touched anything such as door knobs, and when you leave your baby before you touch anything else.

Make sure any visitors who come with you know about proper handwashing and use of sanitising gel.

It may seem obvious but a **daily shower or bath** is a good idea, especially if you will hold your baby skin-to-skin. Your baby still needs to know you by your smell so go easy on perfumed toiletries.

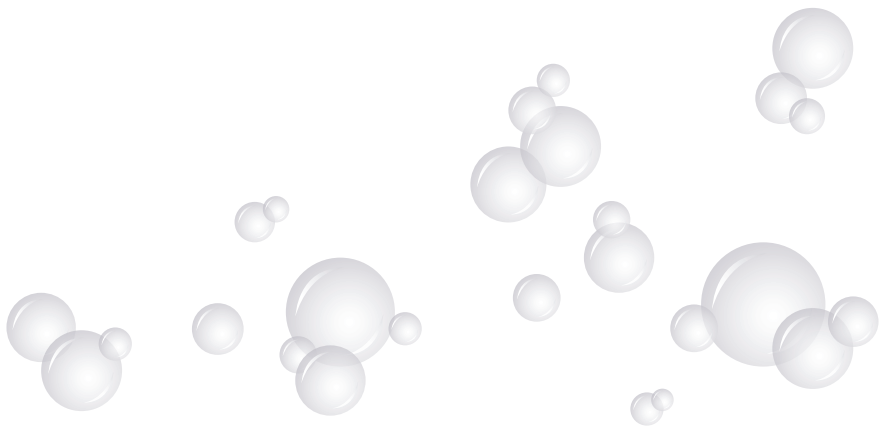
**Remove outdoor clothing** when you arrive in the neonatal unit. Bring a clean top that opens down the front for kangaroo care.



**Remove jewellery** as it can harbour bacteria and may snag your baby's skin. Nail varnish and false nails are usually banned because bacteria can live in scratches and joins.

**Mobile phones** hold a lot of bacteria. If you take yours into the neonatal unit you should clean it with a sanitiser or put it in a clean plastic bag. (Make sure other people's babies do not appear in any videos or pictures that you take).

**Tie back long hair** so it doesn't get in the way when you do things like change a nappy.



# Hand washing

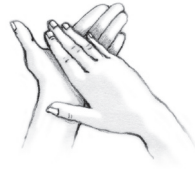
Clean hands protect babies from infection. You may be shown how to wash your hands, if not you can follow this step by step guide. Take about one minute to do this, which is the time it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice. Wash up to your elbows if you will reach into the incubator. You may also use antiseptic gel which should be rubbed in thoroughly all over your hands.



1.



2.



3.



4.



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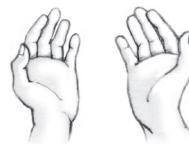
9.



10.



11.



12.

# Getting ready

**Here are some things to think about when you are planning time with your baby.**

**Plan your day** with your baby's nurse so that you know the best time to be with your baby. The more time you can spend getting to know each other, the better.

## **Allow plenty of time**

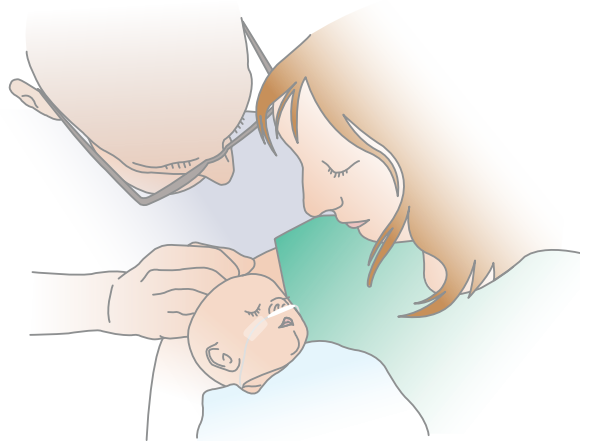
Babies are unpredictable and sensitive. Take your time and watch how your baby reacts.

## **Find out what else is happening**

so that you know when your baby needs rest or will be ready for caregiving. It is a good idea for small babies to have an hour or so to recover after tiring events.

**Notice the atmosphere** in the room. If it is busy, noisy and bright it may unsettle your baby. You can help by doing things carefully and calmly, speaking quietly, closing doors and drawers gently and shading your baby's eyes.

**Get everything ready** so that you can give your baby your full attention. Make sure that you are comfortable, have had something to eat and drink, and have somewhere to sit when you need to.



# Approach

The way you approach your baby helps to get things off to a good start.

## Reaching the bedside

Your baby may be aware of your approach as your movements may cast shadows over him.

## Greet your baby

Speak before you touch so that your baby hears your familiar voice and has a chance to adjust before you touch.

**Open the incubator portholes** so that your baby can hear you more easily.

## Warm hands are important

Your hands will be colder than your baby so rub them together to warm them up.

## Reach in and offer a finger to grasp

or cradle your baby in your hands.

## Try to keep your hands still

Little feathery movements may bother your baby. Calm still resting hands are more soothing.

**Wait for your baby to adjust** and relax. The first reaction may be signs of discomfort. Wait calmly for your baby to relax and give you “permission” to go to the next step.



# Comfort

**Discover what helps your baby to feel secure and comfortable.**

## **On your body or in the bed?**

Holding your baby during caregiving or medical procedures can be a good idea. Ask if this would be possible.

## **Two people are better than one**

A second person can provide comfort and support while the first manages the care or procedure.

**Sucking** a soother or a finger can help your baby stay calm, especially if you dip it in your breastmilk. (This will not interfere with breast feeding later).

**Wrapping** babies in a soft muslin cloth can make them feel safer while you lift them out of bed to your chest or lap, or to be weighed.

**Bedding arranged like a nest** can make your baby comfortable. Babies like to find something to press their feet against and the walls need to be quite high.

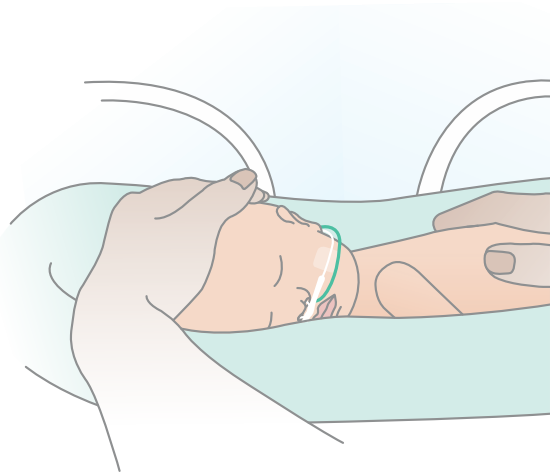
**Side lying** helps babies to curl up and get their hands together or to their face for comfort.

## **Talk and sing to your baby**

Your voice will be soothing. It is also important for your baby's development. Tell your baby what you are doing and what you have noticed she is telling you. You might like to read to your baby.

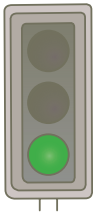
## **Cradle your baby** in your hands.

Catch his hands and feet in your hands as he stretches out, then help him to relax and fold them back in.



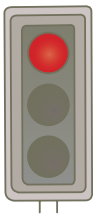
# Tuning in

Time spent watching your baby helps you to tune in and get a sense of how he reacts, what seems to disturb or comfort him.



## Signs that may tell you your baby is content:

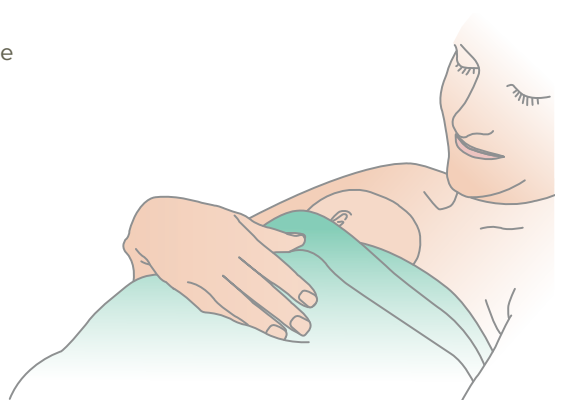
- ✓ Sleeping restfully.
- ✓ Eyes open and shiny when awake.
- ✓ Looking for you when you talk.
- ✓ Even, healthy skin colour.
- ✓ Arms and legs tucked in with feet close together.
- ✓ Regular breathing.



## Signs that may tell you your baby needs you to pause, slow down or stop:

- ✗ Changes in colour or breathing pattern.
- ✗ Stretching movements, lifting arms and legs in the air.
- ✗ Spreading fingers and toes.
- ✗ Fisted hands or clenched toes.
- ✗ Limp arms and droopy cheeks.
- ✗ Twitchy, tremulous movements.

Pace your care to help your baby stay stable and to save energy. This may mean going slowly, which is generally much better in the end than doing things quickly.



# Skin-to-skin

## Kangaroo care

**Kangaroo care will have many benefits for you and your baby. For the best effect your baby will be naked, apart from a nappy and hat, and will lie on you, chest to chest, skin-to-skin.**

**Allow plenty of time,** aim to be free for at least 2 hours.

### **Clothing**

Wear a top that opens down the front so that your baby can lie against your skin on your chest.

### **Seating**

Ideally a comfortable reclining chair positioned close to the incubator.

**Your comfort** and readiness. Make sure you are not hungry or thirsty. Have a bottle of water with you.

### **Stability**

Skin-to-skin is good for the baby with either the mother or the father although the mother's body is more able to adjust to keep the baby's body at the right temperature. Tiny babies need a hat before being moved from the incubator. Have a warm blanket ready for cover.

**Who will lift the baby?** Parents and baby seem to find it easiest if the parent lifts the baby from the incubator or cot straight to their chest but this is not always possible.

**Wrap your baby** and lift in the side position. This helps when transferring from bed to parent, the most difficult bit for your baby.

**Hold your baby close** to your body in the horizontal position. Turn to the upright position gradually when you are seated.

**Place your baby with head turned to one side, chin tilted up,** legs and arms spread across your chest and the back supported with your open hand.

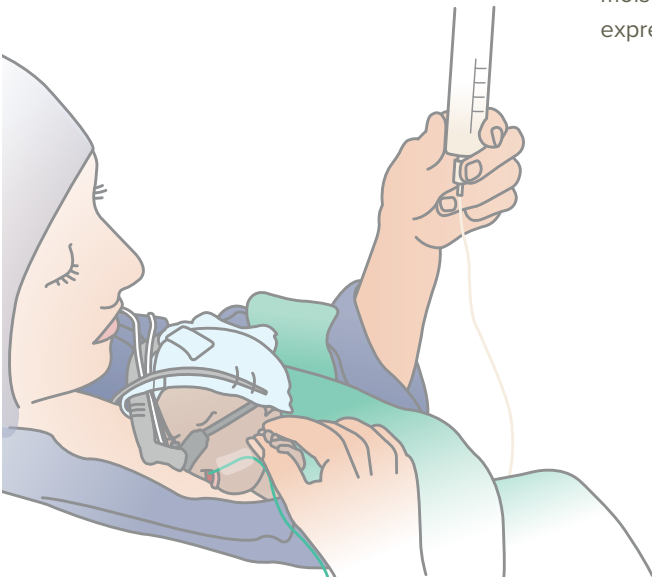
# Feeding

**Getting feeding right starts long before the baby can drink from the breast or bottle. It is very important that feeding is a pleasurable activity for you and your baby.**

**Expressing your breast milk** is one of the most important and unique things a mother can do for her baby. Breast milk is easiest to digest and helps to protect your baby from infection. You may be advised to start expressing regularly soon after the birth. You can express by hand or with a pump.

**Colostrum** is the creamy yellow milk that you express during the first few days after the birth. It comes in small quantities but is extremely valuable because it is rich in nutrients and antibodies to protect your baby's health.

Your baby may not be able to digest your milk at first and you will need to store it for later use. In the meantime, you can clean your baby's mouth and moisturise the lips with colostrum or expressed breastmilk.



**Tube feeding** with a syringe. Parents are a great asset when their baby is tube fed. They can take their time to pace the feed for their baby's comfort. If your baby is in bed you can rest your hand over his body to let him know you are there and this will also let you know when he begins to feel uncomfortable and needs a pause.

**Skin-to-skin holding helps milk production** and breast feeding. You can tube feed your baby during skin-to-skin, which also helps digestion.

**Breast feeding** is highly recommended for many health and development reasons. It is generally easier for a baby than bottle feeding and can be started earlier. There is no evidence that bottle fed babies go home earlier.

Breast feeding may sound like something that comes naturally but it can be quite challenging for a mother and baby on the neonatal unit. Ask if there is a trained lactation consultant to advise you.



# Parting

**Leaving your baby is very hard to do.**

## **Settling your baby before you go**

The way you finish your care can make a lot of difference to how your baby settles.

## **Make your baby comfortable**

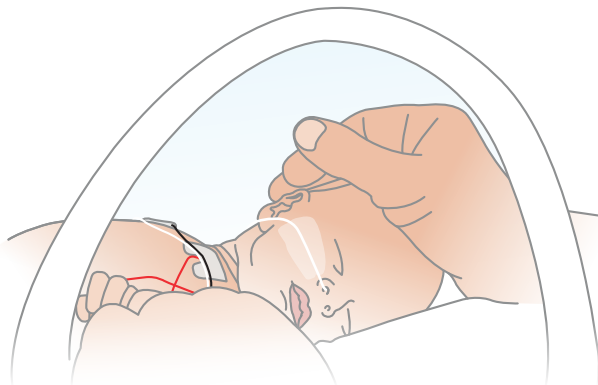
A change of position may be needed.

**Let your baby know that you have finished** and slowly remove your hands.

## **Stay and watch to be sure your baby settles.**

Babies often seem settled at first and then 10 – 20 minutes later they appear restless or uncomfortable and need attention.

**Tell your baby you are ready to go and that you will be back.**

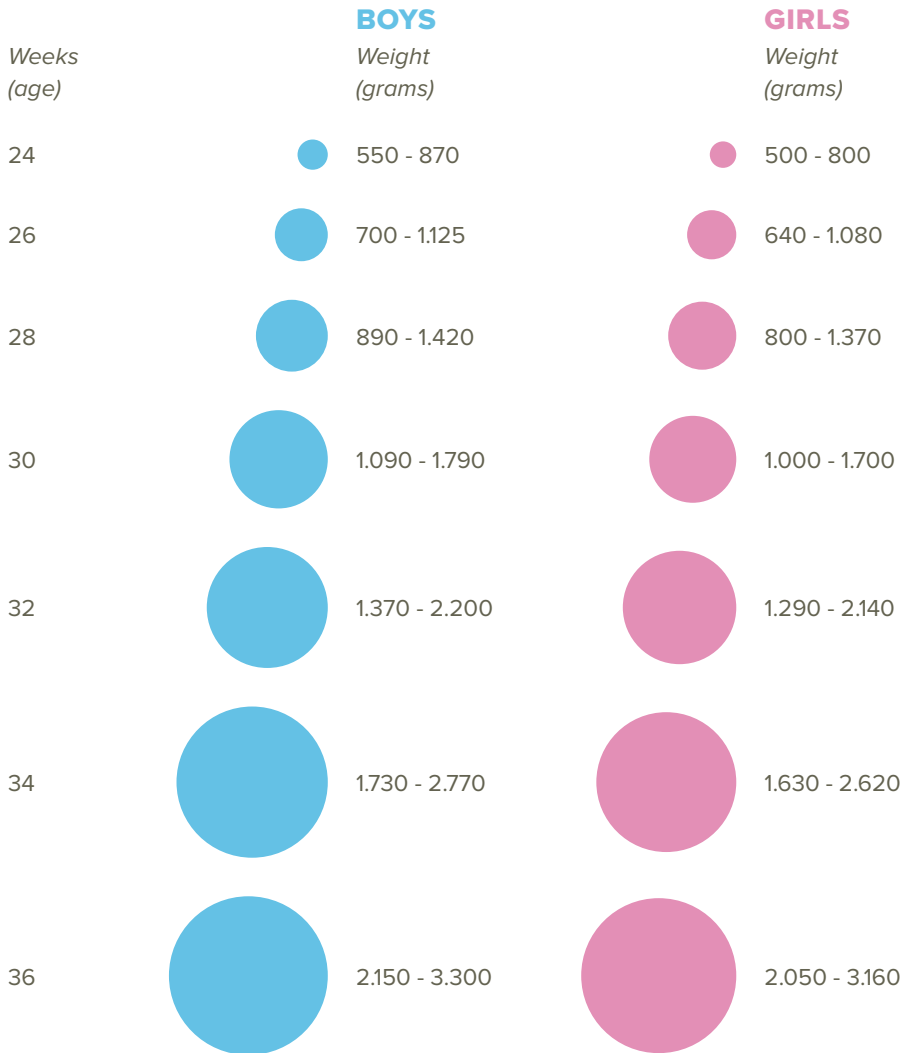




# Last word

**Never be afraid to ask for help or information. You may find it difficult to take everything in and feel awkward about asking the same things over and over again. This is normal and staff should be used to it.**

# Weight chart







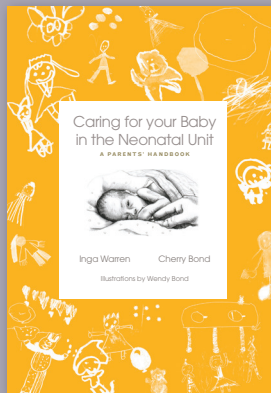






This little book is for all parents who have preterm or newborn babies in need of hospital care. It helps them to get involved with their baby's care, right from the start.

You can find out more about being a parent on the neonatal unit in 'Caring for your Baby in the Neonatal Unit; a Parents Handbook' by Inga Warren and Cherry Bond.



ISBN: 978-1-78306-424-3

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