



SUPPORTING YOUR BABY'S SENSORY DEVELOPMENT

Promoting Healthy Growth

Sensory Support in the NICU

**BC WOMEN'S
HOSPITAL+
HEALTH CENTRE**



Provincial Health Services Authority

YOUR BABY'S SENSORY JOURNEY

in the womb
and in the NICU

As a parent, you are the most important part of your baby's sensory development. While your baby receives medical care in the NICU, we aim to support your baby's growing senses. We do this by creating a womb-like environment.

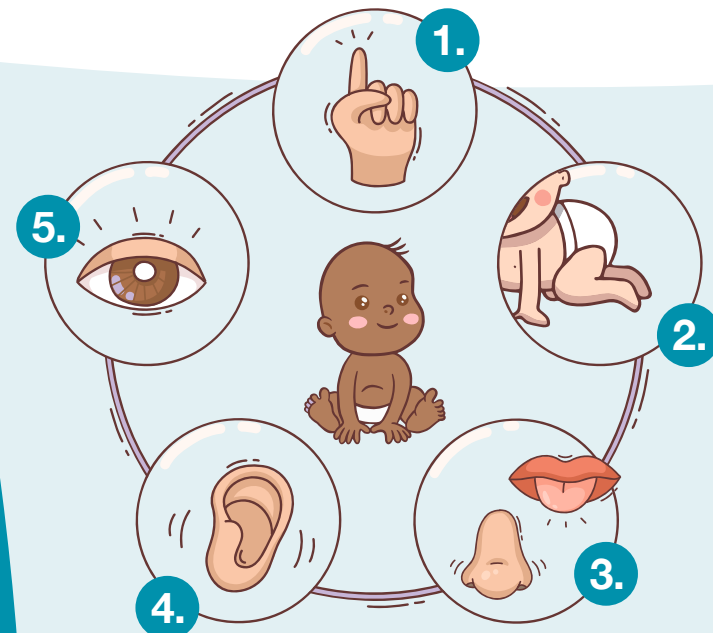
The womb is the perfect place for a baby's senses to develop. In the womb, your baby got the right amount of stimulation for their developing brain and body. Your baby experienced sound, touch, smell, taste, and movement and balance. Each experience was at the right level for your baby's development. As your baby explored their environment in the womb, they had a positive sensory experience. This means that each experience helped your baby grow and develop.

At birth, your baby moved to a different environment. In the NICU, they experience bright lights, loud and unpredictable sounds, gravity that pulls their arms and legs, and unfamiliar smells and touch. They may also experience painful or uncomfortable procedures. Your baby may not be ready for these experiences.

The NICU team will work with you to promote and provide positive sensory experiences. We will help you with practices like supportive positions and touch, sleep and waking strategies, and skin-to-skin contact or kangaroo care.

Your baby's sensory journey started to develop in the womb. They will continue to develop in the NICU. The senses develop in a specific order, even when babies are born early:

1. Touch is first
2. Movement and balance (also called vestibular awareness)
3. Smell and taste
4. Hearing
5. Sight (or vision)



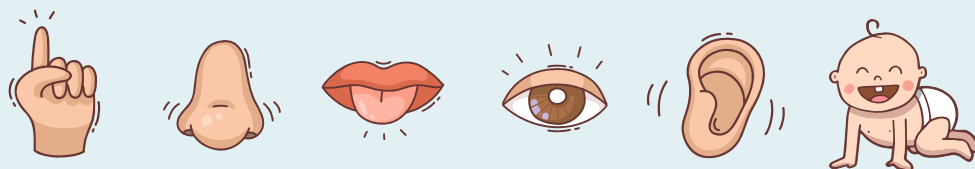
You can help your baby by offering positive sensory experiences that match their stage of development. You can do this by using the pages below.

Each card introduces activities for you and your baby. The first two pages have information and activities that are good for your baby at any age. Then, find the page with information and activities for your baby's gestational age. Each week is divided into five sensory areas. You will see the images below to describe which sense the activities are for.

A glossary at the end of this booklet covers many terms you might hear during your time in the NICU. Always feel free to ask your health care team for explanations if anything is unclear.



Your nurse can answer your questions. They will support you to participate in your baby's care. When you see the **words that are bolded**, turn to the family activity card to learn more about this activity.



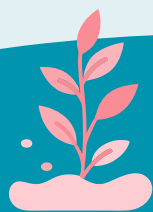
YOUR NICU SENSORY JOURNEY STARTS HERE



all
ages



23-25
weeks



26-28
weeks



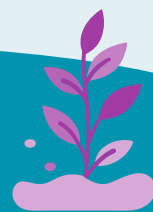
29-31
weeks



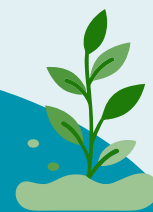
32-34
weeks



35-37
weeks



38-40
weeks



post-term
1 month

DEVELOPMENTAL CARE SUPPORTS SENSORY DEVELOPMENT

Developmental care is the way we provide care to each baby in the NICU to support their needs and reduce stress in the environment. Adapting care to the baby helps to improve neurodevelopmental outcomes and well-being.

Developmental care is shown to support physiological stability (heart & breathing rate), support sleep, and promote growth and development. It includes care that supports your baby's sensory development by decreasing stimuli in the environment and providing cue based care. Parent participation in care in the NICU is key to developmental care and is shown to be directly related to improving babies' health outcomes.



BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

USING SENSES TO BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR BABY

- Watch how your baby reacts to different cares and experiences. You can learn how your baby moves, how their colour changes, how they settle and stay calm, what touch and holding they like, and how they respond to their environment.
- Your baby will learn about you by hearing your voice, feeling your touch and cuddles, and smelling your scent.
- You will learn about your baby by watching them, smelling them, listening to them, and touching and holding them.
- Your NICU team will support you to build your relationship with your baby. We will help you learn to communicate with each other.

MAKING TIME FOR SENSORY EXPERIENCES

- Your presence and participation in your baby's care are important for your baby's health in the NICU and beyond. Parenting moments are times that you provide care, interact, or comfort your baby.
- When you are focused on your baby and caring for them, you are helping their brain develop and creating a relationship with them.
- In the NICU, your parenting moments can include diaper changes, swaddled bathing, kangaroo care, and many other types of care. These moments offer sensory experiences that connect you and your baby.

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT MY BABY NEEDS?

- Your baby communicates in different ways. Even if your baby was born small, early, or sick, they will communicate with you. Babies tell us what they need through body movements, facial expressions, behaviours, postures, and health changes.
- In the NICU, we encourage you to offer cue-based care. As you learn your baby's cues, you will know what they need. You will also be able to tell if they are enjoying a sensory experience.

BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

YOUR BABY COMMUNICATES WITH YOU IN DIFFERENT WAYS.

Cue-based care is when procedures, care, and the environment are adapted to your baby's needs and sleep/wake cycles. Learning their stop and go cues supports cue-based care. Spend some time watching your baby and looking for these cues.

I'M CONTENT AND READY FOR INTERACTION



GO CUES



- SMILING
- MOUTHING
- COOING
- RELAXED LIMBS
- MINIMAL MOVEMENTS
- SMOOTH MOVEMENTS
- COMFORTABLY AWAKE
- HANDS TO FACE
- QUIET EYE OPENING
- SUCKING
- FLEXED BODY

I'M STRESSED AND/OR OVERSTIMULATED!



STOP CUES



- YAWNING
- HICCUPING
- SPITTING UP
- COLOUR CHANGES
- LOOKING AWAY
- "STOP" HAND
- TRUNK ARCHING
- STIFF, STRAIGHT LEGS
- BRADYS & DESATS
- FRANTIC MOVEMENTS
- FACIAL GRIMACE



ALL AGES

Introduction to the Sensory System

Babies are impacted by the world around them. Our senses help us to learn about the world. However, being in the hospital changes how your baby experiences the world. Sensory experiences in the NICU can play a part in learning and memory. It is important to make sure your baby receives the right kind of stimulation in the NICU, to support their developing senses.

What can you do to support your baby?

BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP

Learn about the sensory system and how you can participate and respond to your baby's needs.

Bonding and attachment are enhanced through responding to your baby's needs. Your touch, voice, and loving care supports their need for attachment and provides them with a sense of safety. Your relationship is strengthened with each positive interaction.

Here is a summary of key components of the sensory system, along with how families can participate in care and support development. After reading this, you can go to the page that corresponds to your baby's gestational age for specific activities for each stage of development.



SENSE OF TOUCH

Baby's sense of touch is developed at birth. They experience pressure, pain, temperature, and vibration. Touch promotes the increase in the hormone oxytocin, which helps us relax, lowers stress levels, releases feelings of trust and compassion. **The best place for your baby to develop is in skin-to-skin contact or kangaroo care. Kangaroo care helps your baby's brain to develop.**

- A parent's loving touch is very important to your baby's brain development. Positive touch comforts and calms your baby. You can provide touch through finger holding, hand hugs, skin-to-skin contact, and holding their hands close to their chest.
- During uncomfortable or painful procedures, your touch calms your baby and decreases pain and stress.
- Provide care with your baby's nurse as much as you can.
- Babies grow, develop and heal when they are asleep. Plan activities and cares around your baby's sleep to promote uninterrupted sleep.



SENSE OF VISION

Newborns have limited vision at birth, especially premature babies. They can see high-contrast patterns and can focus on objects up to about 8-12 inches away, which is the distance between their face and a parent's face when held. **Your face is the best thing for your baby to look at.**

- The more premature your baby, the more sensitive they are to light during the first weeks of life.
- Make eye contact when talking to your baby.
- Your face is the best thing for developing vision.

AVOID

- Avoid bright lights as this can harm their sight development.
- Avoid giving your baby toys or pictures until their due date.



ALL AGES

Introduction to the Sensory System



SENSE OF HEARING

Babies can hear sounds in the womb and their hearing continues to develop after birth. In the NICU, noises from machines, alarms, and voices can be overwhelming, so minimizing unnecessary noise is important. Talking to your baby, singing softly, or reading in a calm voice can be comforting and help your baby feel secure. **Your baby knows your voice. It is comforting for them.**

- Read, sing, talk to your baby from birth. Hearing helps your baby develop language skills later in life.
- When babies are very small or born early, speak in a quiet voice until they are older.
- Keep their room calm and quiet.



SENSE OF SMELL AND TASTE

A baby's sense of taste and smell are also developing in the NICU. The sense of smell is closely tied to emotional development, and the scent of parent's skin can help soothe the baby. Breastfeeding and kangaroo care, if possible, provides comfort through taste and smell. **Your scent is comforting and familiar to your baby.**

- Use a scent cloth to share your scent with your baby.
- You can start giving small amounts of your milk to your baby right after birth. This is called oral immune therapy or OIT. Your milk provides protection against bacteria and infections. Your breast milk acts like a medicine..
- Your scent and smell of breast milk helps your baby bond with you and lowers their stress.
- Breastfeeding is not only beneficial for nutrition but also vital in providing sensory input for co-regulation and brain development.

AVOID

- Avoid strong smells (fragrances, cigarette smoke) and let hand sanitizer dry before touching your baby. These can be stressful for baby.



SENSE OF MOVEMENT AND BALANCE

Babies are constantly moving in the womb. It is also important to position babies to feel contained and supported as if they are in the womb. **This promotes comfort, stability, and development.**

- When your baby is ready, offer opportunities for gentle stretching and movement when changing their diaper or a position change.
- Babies need to feel contained and supported to prevent stress. Use global touch to help baby into a flexed midline position. Help your baby have their hands near their face, and their arms and legs flexed to their belly.
- Use Talk Touch Care before you do an activity or care with your baby. Always talk first, then touch, then move or care for your baby. This gives them time to self-regulate and prepare themselves. End the care with a positive touch like a hand hug or finger to hold.



Remember: Each baby has their unique developmental journey. Some babies may take longer to move to the next stage of development. This is OK. We are here to help you meet your baby's needs at the stage they are at.



STAGE 1

23-25 WEEKS

Here are a few things you can do with your baby each week. Learn and respond to their **GO** and **STOP** cues.



TOUCH



SMELL & TASTE



VISION & LIGHT



HEARING



MOVEMENT & BODY AWARENESS

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Start **kangaroo care** as soon as possible and for as long as possible.
- Give continuous **positive touch** as often as possible.
- Give **hand hugs** before, during and after cares and during **painful procedures**.
- Provide care with 2 people, also called **4 handed care**.
- Prepare baby for touch with **Talk, Touch, Care**.
- Spend extra time **holding baby's feet** where pokes happen.

- **Do kangaroo care** to share family scent and opportunity for taste.
- Use **scent cloths**.
- Give **OIT**.
- Use breast milk for oral care.
- Offer soother for comfort and **non-nutritive sucking**.

- Baby's eyelids are thin.
- Keep lights off or very low. Baby is sensitive to light changes.
- Protect baby's eyes if room lights are on.
- Cover baby's eyes when light is needed for care.
- Keep incubator covered.

- Talk quietly to your baby throughout the day.
- Sing to your baby in a soft voice: hum quietly, sing lullabies, or make up tunes or songs.
- Read aloud to your baby in a soft voice: Read stories, nursery rhymes, or your favourite book aloud for baby to hear.
- Use **Talk, Touch, Care**.
- Talk quietly in the room.

- Position baby in a **flexed midline position**. Help position shoulders forward, hands close to face, and legs tucked up.
- Move baby slowly for position changes.
- Provide **global touch**. Give 360-degree boundaries as much as possible.
- Let baby freely move and stretch during **diaper changes and kangaroo care**.
- Support your baby's sleep with long periods of **kangaroo care and clustering care** when needed.

TO AVOID

- Avoid stroking, patting, and tickling at this age.

- Avoid strong smells like perfume, cigarette smoke or hand sanitizer.
- Let hand sanitizer dry fully before putting hands near baby.

- Avoid direct light into baby's eyes.

- Avoid recorded music at this age.
- Avoid loud noises by keeping phones and the TV silent.



STAGE 2

26-28 WEEKS

Here are a few things you can do with your baby each week. Learn and respond to their **GO** and **STOP** cues.



TOUCH



SMELL & TASTE



VISION & LIGHT



HEARING



MOVEMENT & BODY AWARENESS

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Start **kangaroo care** as soon as possible and for as long as possible.
- Give continuous **positive touch** as often as possible.
- Give **hand hugs** before, during and after cares and during painful procedures.
- Provide care with 2 people, also called **4 handed care**.
- Prepare baby for touch with **Talk, Touch, Care**.
- Spend extra time **holding baby's feet** where pokes happen.

- Do **kangaroo care** to share family scent and opportunity for taste.
- Use **scent cloths**.
- Give **OIT** and use milk for mouth care.
- Hold baby during tube feeds.
- Offer soother for comfort and **non-nutritive sucking**. If baby shows sucking cues and go signals, offer a soother dipped in milk.

- Keep lights off or very low. Baby is sensitive to light changes.
- Protect baby's eyes if room lights are on.
- Cover baby's eyes when light is needed for care.
- Keep incubator covered.

- Talk quietly to your baby throughout the day.
- Sing to your baby in a soft voice: Hum quietly, sing lullabies, or make up tunes and songs.
- Read aloud to your baby in a soft voice: Read stories, nursery rhymes, or your favorite book aloud for baby to hear.
- **Use Talk, Touch, Care.**
- Talk quietly in the room.

- Position baby in a **flexed midline position**. Help position shoulders forward, hands close to face, and legs tucked up.
- Move baby slowly for position changes.
- Provide **global touch**. Give 360-degree boundaries as much as possible.
- Let baby freely move and stretch during **diaper changes and kangaroo care**.
- Support your baby's sleep with long periods of kangaroo care and **clustering care** when needed.

TO AVOID

- Avoid stroking, patting, and tickling at this age.

- Avoid strong smells like perfume, cigarette smoke or hand sanitizer.
- Let hand sanitizer dry fully before putting hands near baby.

- Baby's eyelids are thin. Avoid direct light into baby's eyes.
- Avoid visual stimulation like toys or pictures.

- Avoid recorded music at this age.
- Avoid loud noises by keeping phones and the TV silent.



STAGE 3

29-31 WEEKS

Here are a few things you can do with your baby each week. Learn and respond to their **GO** and **STOP** cues.



TOUCH



SMELL & TASTE



VISION & LIGHT



HEARING



MOVEMENT & BODY AWARENESS

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Start **kangaroo care** as soon as possible and for as long as possible.
- Give continuous **positive touch** as often as possible.
- Give **hand hugs** before, during and after cares and during painful procedures.
- Provide care with 2 people, also called **4 handed care**.
- Prepare baby for touch with **Talk, Touch, Care**.
- Spend extra time holding baby's feet where pokes happen.

- Do **kangaroo care** to share family scent and opportunity for tastes of milk.
- Use **scent cloths**.
- Give **OIT** and use milk for mouth care.
- Hold baby during tube feeds.
- Offer soother for comfort and **non-nutritive sucking**. If baby shows sucking cues and go signals, offer a soother dipped in milk.

- Baby may be able to focus on faces for short times.
- Keep lights off or very low. Baby is sensitive to light changes.
- Cover baby's eyes when light is needed for care.
- Keep incubator covered.

- Talk quietly to your baby throughout the day.
- Sing to your baby in a soft voice: hum quietly, sing lullabies, or make up tunes or songs.
- Read aloud to your baby in a soft voice: Read stories, nursery rhymes, or your favourite book aloud for baby to hear.
- Use **Talk, Touch, Care**.
- Talk quietly in the room.

- Position baby in a **flexed midline position**. Help position shoulders forward, hands close to face, and legs tucked up.
- Move baby slowly for position changes.
- Provide **global touch**. Give 360-degree boundaries as much as possible.
- Let baby freely move and stretch during **diaper changes and kangaroo care**.
- Support your baby's sleep with long periods of kangaroo care and **clustering care** when needed.

TO AVOID

- Avoid stroking, patting, and tickling at this age.

- Avoid strong smells like perfume, cigarette smoke or hand sanitizer.
- Let hand sanitizer dry fully before putting hands near baby.

- Baby's eyelids are thin. Avoid direct light into baby's eyes.
- Avoid visual stimulation like toys or pictures.

- Avoid recorded music at this age.
- Avoid loud noises by keeping phones and the TV silent.



STAGE 4

32-34 WEEKS

Here are a few things you can do with your baby each week. Learn and respond to their **GO** and **STOP** cues.



TOUCH



SMELL & TASTE



VISION & LIGHT



HEARING



MOVEMENT & BODY AWARENESS

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Start **kangaroo care** as soon as possible and for as long as possible.
- Give continuous **positive touch** as often as possible.
- Baby might like some simple stroking. Babies prefer whole hand rather than light touches or tickles.
- Prepare baby for touch with **Talk, Touch, Care**.
- Provide care with 2 people, also called 4 handed care.
- Give **hand hugs** before, during and after cares and during painful procedures.

- Do **kangaroo care** to share family scent and opportunity for tastes of milk.
- Hold baby during tube feeds. Baby may show early feeding cues. Talk to your nurse about transitioning to oral feeds.
- Offer soother for comfort and **non-nutritive sucking**. If baby shows sucking cues and go signals, offer a soother dipped in milk. Ask about offering drops of milk.
- Use **scent cloths**.
- Give **OIT and use milk for mouth care**.

- Provide natural light during the day. Keep lights low or off at night.
- Adjust incubator cover to slowly allow more light during the day. Begin by lifting one corner.
- When baby shows go cues, engage with baby face-to-face.

- Talk quietly to your baby throughout the day.
- Sing to your baby in a soft voice: hum quietly, sing lullabies, or make up tunes or songs.
- Read aloud to your baby in a soft voice: Read stories, nursery rhymes, or your favourite book aloud for baby to hear.
- When baby shows cues, engage with baby face-to-face and softly talk or sing.
- **Use Talk, Touch, Care.**
- Talk quietly in the room.

- Position baby in a **flexed midline position**. Help position shoulders forward, hands close to face, and legs tucked up.
- Move baby slowly for position changes.
- Let baby freely move and stretch during **diaper changes and kangaroo care**.
- Rock gently during holding or transfers.
- Help baby to move their hands to face and mouth.
- Review how to transition to **safe sleep** with your nurse. Learn when baby is ready to transition to a **safe sleep surface**.
- When baby is ready for tub baths, introduce **swaddled bathing**.

TO AVOID

- Avoid strong smells like perfume, cigarette smoke or hand sanitizer.
- Let hand sanitizer dry fully before putting hands near baby.

- Avoid recorded music at this age.
- Avoid loud noises by keeping phones and the TV silent.



STAGE 5

35-37 WEEKS

Here are a few things you can do with your baby each week. Learn and respond to their **GO** and **STOP** cues.



TOUCH



SMELL & TASTE



VISION & LIGHT



HEARING



MOVEMENT & BODY AWARENESS

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Start **kangaroo care** as soon as possible and for as long as possible.
- Give continuous **positive touch** as often as possible.
- Baby might like some simple stroking. Babies prefer whole hand touch rather than light touches or tickles.
- Prepare baby for touch with **Talk, Touch, Care**.
- Provide care with 2 people, also called 4 handed care.
- Give **hand hugs** before, during and after cares and during painful procedures.

- Do **kangaroo care** to share family scent and opportunity for tastes of milk.
- Hold baby during tube feeds. Baby may show early feeding cues. Talk to your nurse about transitioning to oral feeds.
- Offer soother for comfort and **non-nutritive sucking**. If baby shows sucking cues and go signals, offer a soother dipped in milk. Ask about offering drops of milk.
- Use **scent cloths**.
- Give **OIT and use milk for mouth care**.

- Provide natural light during the day. Keep lights low or off at night.
- Engage face to face with baby when showing cues.

- Your voice is best for your baby's hearing.
- Talk quietly to your baby throughout the day.
- Sing to your baby in a soft voice: Hum quietly, sing lullabies, or make up tunes and songs.
- Read aloud to your baby in a soft voice: Read stories, nursery rhymes, or your favorite book aloud for baby to hear.
- When baby shows go cues, engage with baby face-to-face and softly talk or sing.
- Use **Talk, Touch, Care**.
- Talk quietly in the room.

- Most babies can start tummy time at 37 weeks. Ask your nurse about different ways to do **tummy time**.
- Position baby in a **flexed midline position**. Move baby slowly for position changes. Help baby to move their hands to face and mouth.
- Let baby freely move and stretch during **diaper changes and kangaroo care**.
- Rock gently during holding or transfers.
- Prepare for **safe sleep** positioning. Learn when baby is ready to transition to a **safe sleep surface**.
- When baby is ready for tub baths, introduce **swaddled bathing**.

TO AVOID

- Avoid strong smells like perfume, cigarette smoke or hand sanitizer.
- Let hand sanitizer dry fully before putting hands near baby.

- Avoid high contrast images (like black and white pictures).

- Avoid loud noises by keeping phones and the TV silent.



STAGE 6

38-40 WEEKS

Here are a few things you can do with your baby each week. Learn and respond to their **GO** and **STOP** cues.



TOUCH



SMELL & TASTE



VISION & LIGHT



HEARING



MOVEMENT & BODY AWARENESS

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Start (or continue) **kangaroo care** as soon as possible and for as long as possible.
- As they grow, some babies no longer enjoy being in a wrap. They still benefit from skin-to-skin contact and holding.
- Take baby out of bed between **kangaroo care** time.
- Baby might like some simple stroking. Babies prefer whole hand touch rather than light touches or tickles.
- Prepare baby for touch with **Talk, Touch, Care.**
- Provide care with 2 people, also called **4 handed care.**
- Give **hand hugs** before, during and after cares and during painful procedures.

- Your baby knows your scent.
- **Do kangaroo care** to share family scent and opportunity for tastes of milk.
- If baby is not orally feeding, hold them during tube feeds.
- Help baby learn to feed by following and responding to their **cues and behaviours.**
- Use **scent cloths.**

- Provide natural light during the day. Keep lights low or off at night.
- Covers on the crib should not be used.
- Engage face to face with baby when showing cues.

- Your voice is best for your baby's hearing.
- Talk quietly to your baby throughout the day.
- Sing to your baby in a soft voice: Hum quietly, sing lullabies, or make up tunes and songs
- Read aloud to your baby in a soft voice: Read stories, nursery rhymes, or your favorite book aloud for baby to hear.
- When baby shows go cues, engage with baby face-to-face and softly talk or sing.
- Use **Talk, Touch, Care.**
- Talk quietly in the room.

- Position baby in a **flexed midline position.** Help position shoulders forward, hands close to face, and legs tucked up.
- Let baby move freely in the crib and when held.
- Most babies are ready for tummy time a few times a day. Ask about different ways to do **tummy time.**
- Rock gently during holding or transfers.
- Help baby to move their hands to face and mouth.
- Review the **safe sleep checklist.** Learn when baby is ready to transition to **a safe sleep surface.**
- When baby is ready for tub baths, introduce **swaddled bathing.**

TO AVOID

- Avoid strong smells like perfume, cigarette smoke or hand sanitizer.
- Let hand sanitizer dry fully before putting hands near baby.

- Avoid high contrast images (like black and white pictures).

- Avoid loud noises by keeping phones and the TV silent.



STAGE 7

POST TERM (1 MONTH)

Here are a few things you can do with your baby each week. Learn and respond to their **GO** and **STOP** cues.



TOUCH



SMELL & TASTE



VISION & LIGHT



HEARING



MOVEMENT & BODY AWARENESS

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Offer **cue-based** care.
- Start (or continue) **kangaroo care** as soon as possible and for as long as possible.
- Some babies do not like being in a wrap as they get bigger. They will still benefit from skin-to-skin contact and holding.
- Take baby out of bed between **kangaroo care** time.
- Baby might like simple stroking. Babies prefer whole hand touch instead of light touches or tickles.
- Prepare baby for touch with **Talk, Touch, Care**.
- Give **hand hugs** or hold your baby before, during and after painful procedures.

- Your baby knows your scent.
- During **kangaroo care**, your baby experiences family scent. They may also taste milk and learn to feed.
- If baby is not orally feeding, hold them during tube feeds.
- Help baby feed by responding to their cues and behaviours.
- Use **scent cloths**.
- Let hand sanitizer dry fully before putting hands near baby.

- Lights can be on during the day and off at night.
- Light during the day helps vision to develop.
- Darkness at night helps baby sleep.
- Baby may be ready to look at black and white pictures for brief periods (15 minutes).
- Your face is better for your baby's vision than toys and pictures.

- Talk to your baby throughout the day.
- Sing to your baby throughout the day: Hum quietly, sing lullabies, or make up tunes and songs.
- Read aloud to your baby throughout the day: Read stories, nursery rhymes, or your favorite book aloud for baby to hear.
- Engage with baby face-to-face and softly talk or sing.
- Play **soft music or recorded voice** for brief periods (15-20 minutes). See how baby responds with cues and behaviours.
- Music should be quiet enough that you can talk normally.

- Let baby move and stretch during care and when held.
- Help baby to move their hands to face and mouth.
- When baby is ready for tub baths, begin **swaddled bathing**.
- Most babies are ready for tummy time a few times a day. Ask about different ways to do **tummy time**.
- Help baby into a **safe sleep** position.
- When baby is awake, take them out of bed for cuddles and play time. You can hold baby, lay them on the parent bed, or place them on a mat on the floor.
- Rock slowly while you hold baby.

TO AVOID

- Avoid strong smells like perfume, cigarette smoke or hand sanitizer.
- Let hand sanitizer dry fully before putting hands near baby.

- Avoid having music on when baby sleeps.

- Avoid swaddling to allow free movement.

NICU GLOSSARY

Cue-based Care – is an approach that recognizes and responds to baby’s behavioural cues and their sleep/wake state. Procedures, caregiving, and the environment are adapted to each baby’s needs. The goals of cue-based care are to provide an environment that is both physiologically and developmentally supportive. Sometimes **cluster care** or grouping several cares together to provide long periods of rest is recommended. *Cluster care based on baby’s tolerance to avoid overstimulation.*

Cluster Care – means to cluster or group several cares or procedures together, instead of spacing them out over time. The goal of cluster care is to promote rest for longer periods, avoid handling, and disturbing sleep cycles.

Developmental Care – is providing care that is individualized to each baby’s age and capabilities by adjusting the environment and care to reduce stress and promote neurodevelopment.

Diaper Changes (side-lying) – changing your baby’s diaper while they are on their side can be less stressful. It helps baby to stay in a flexed position with hands close to face.

Family-centered Care – is a way of doing care that supports parents to participate in care from birth and be physically and emotionally close to their baby. There are four main components of Family-Centered Care: respect and dignity, information sharing, participation, collaboration.

Four-handed Care – is when two people support a baby during care. Ideally, at least one parent is involved in the care at all times, supporting your baby, while the healthcare provider does the care with your baby.

Gestational Age – is the number of weeks a baby is carried in the womb. Gestational age is counted from the first day of the mother’s last menstrual period before conception until birth.

Global Touch – The goal of global touch is to provide positive touch, boundaries, and a sense of being in the womb. This can be done with hands and developmental supports (nesting, rolls, and blankets).

Go Cues – are cues or behaviours that your baby may show when they are content and ready to interact.

Hand Hugging – also known as facilitated tucking is when you place one hand on your baby’s head and the other hand is either: cupping your baby’s feet or placed over their arms/tummy while your baby is supported in a flexed midline position.

Heel Holds – is the gentle holding of your baby’s heel with positive touch, where their heels often are poked for blood work.

Kangaroo Care – is the skin-to-skin holding of your baby (wearing only a diaper) against your bare chest, secured with a wrap.

Reading, Singing, Talking – all support language development, even when your baby is born early, small or sick. Hearing your voice is comforting for your baby.

Midline Position – refers to keeping baby in a fetal-like position, with tucked arms and legs and boundaries to push against. Good positioning helps align your baby’s muscles, bones and joints in a developmentally supportive way. It also helps with self-regulation and coping.

Non-nutritive Sucking – is when a baby sucks on a soother without drinking milk. It helps to strengthen your baby’s feeding muscles, lower stress levels, provide comfort, and help baby to be in a relaxed alert state. Non-nutritive sucking is helpful during a tube feed to help with digestion.

Oral Immune Therapy (OIT) – is giving small amounts of your breast milk into your baby’s cheek when they are not feeding by mouth.

Positive Touch – is touch to your baby’s body and skin that stimulates the release of positive hormones and feelings that support medical stability and overall brain development.

Scent Cloth – is a piece of fabric that can be used to transfer a parent’s scent to a baby or a baby’s scent to a parent. The familiar scent of each person can provide a sense of comfort.

Stop Cues – are cues and behaviours that your baby may show when they are stressed or need a break.

Swaddled Bathing – is recommended for all babies when they are ready for a tub bath. Wrap your baby in a blanket before immersing in the water. This will keep them calm and comfortable.

Skin-to-skin Contact – also known as Kangaroo Care. It is the holding of a baby against a parent’s bare chest (wearing only a diaper) for early and prolonged periods of time.

Talk Touch Care – is a way to approach care by providing your baby a predictable flow of care. First, talk to you baby to let them know you are there. Second, warm your hands, place your still hands on your baby and let them know what you are doing. Third, provide care and finish slowly with a final still touch.

SENSORY SUPPORT IN THE NICU

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