

Tips for Dads with a baby in the NICU or SCN



Being a dad in the neonatal unit is often stressful and overwhelming. Nothing can prepare you for what it's like to have a baby born premature or sick, or for the rollercoaster of events that follow. It's completely understandable to feel a mix of emotions including anger, sadness, grief and guilt.

These tips are designed to help you focus on the things you can control to look after yourself, your partner and your baby.

BE PROACTIVE

You might feel quite helpless in the hospital but there are lots of things you can do:

- Bond with your baby through kangaroo care or by singing and reading to them.
- Take photos/videos of your baby to share with your partner and extended family members.
- Get to know the staff and equipment in the NICU/SCN. Ask questions to become as informed as possible.
- Ask your social worker for services that may benefit you.
- Talk to your employer about flexible work arrangements or extended leave.
- Be there for your partner – keep talking and checking in.
- Connect with others going through the same experience, e.g. via LLTF support groups.
- Share how you're feeling with someone you trust – this can help to reduce stress and lighten the load.
- Plan ahead for when baby comes home, e.g. a supply of freezer meals and a roster for help with domestic chores.

GET INVOLVED IN YOUR BABY'S CARE

You can have a powerful impact on your baby's health and development with the love and care you provide. Here's how:

- Spend as much time as you can with your baby.
- Handle your baby gently. Hold their hand or put your hand on their back, head or bottom and feel them breathe.
- Learn how they like to be soothed and held, and how noise affects them.
- Talk or sing softly, say 'hello' and 'goodbye' and read stories to your baby.
- Hold your baby and do kangaroo care often.
- Learn to change nappies and bath your baby in such a way that they know it's you.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

It's important to take care of your own physical and emotional health so you can be there for your partner and baby. Try to:

- Maintain a routine.
- Prioritise adequate sleep.
- Reduce stress with regular exercise.
- Eat nutritious meals and snacks.
- Make time for relaxation, e.g. read, watch TV, meditate.
- Avoid using alcohol, medications or other drugs to manage the situation.
- Be mindful of your own feelings and needs. If you're not coping, talk to other parents, friends or health professionals.



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