

Post-NICU Tips to Support Parents



Congratulations on bringing your baby home! You may be wondering what to expect and how to manage in this next phase. We've provided some tips and resources to help you navigate life after the NICU.

What to expect when you are home from the NICU:^{1,2}



- It can take time for you and your baby to settle back at home
- You will likely have ongoing medical visits and follow-up appointments
- You might have to restrict the number of visitors you have to reduce the risk of friends and family passing on infections to your baby
- Expect to experience a lack of sleep as baby will wake overnight for feeds, follow the feeding and sleep routine you have been taught by the NICU staff

What mental health signs to look out for:^{3,4}

Emotional signs to look out for when you return home include:



- Loss of interest in the baby
- Feeling hopeless and like you are unable to cope
- Excessive anxiety about your baby
- Being unable to enjoy anything
- Memory loss or inability to concentrate
- Feeling you are not a good enough parent or that your baby does not love you
- Problems with bonding with your baby and not enjoying spending time with them
- Feeling agitated towards your partner, baby or your other children

Physical signs to look out for when you return home include:



Panic attacks



Sleeplessness



Extreme fatigue



Aches and pains



Loss of appetite



If you are experiencing any of the signs above, talk to your doctor to get the support and resources you may need.

1. Bliss. When you get home. [online] Available at: <https://www.bliss.org.uk/parents/going-home-from-the-neonatal-unit/when-you-get-home-from-the-neonatal-unit/>. [Accessed 8 Aug. 2022].

2. NHS. Sleep and tiredness after having a baby. [online] Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/support-and-services/sleep-and-tiredness-after-having-a-baby/>. [Accessed 8 Aug. 2022].

3. NHS. Feeling depressed after childbirth. [online] nhs.uk. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/support-and-services/feeling-depressed-after-childbirth/>. [Accessed 8 Aug. 2022].

4. NHS (2021). Symptoms - Postnatal depression. [online] nhs.uk. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/post-natal-depression/symptoms/>. [Accessed 8 Aug. 2022].

How to take time for yourself and practice some self care



Having a new baby at home can be a handful, and it's not expected to achieve all of these self-care tips, but it's important to take time and practice even one or two.

How to take the time and practice self-care:^{5,6}



- Participate in relaxing activities such as breathing exercises, practicing yoga
- Participate in physical activities such as walking, swimming, or hiking
- Taking a warm bath or shower, reading, or using adult coloring books
- Make time for your partner, if you have one, even if this just means watching TV together
- Make sure to get some rest - i.e., sleep when your baby sleeps and try to get an early night at least once a week
- Express yourself and acknowledge that you are human and experiencing a difficult time

Let friends and family know what they want help with so basic needs can be met and allow them time to practice self-care

Who to speak with for support once you're out of the NICU:⁶



- Contact your doctor if you are experiencing symptoms of depression and emotions that are affecting your everyday life
- Reduce stress and anxiety around follow-up appointments by writing down questions you want to ask before each appointment
- Talk to other parents who are going through the same situation. Join a support group to connect with other parents of premature babies

How to communicate with friends and family and what they can do to support you:⁷⁻¹⁰



- Think about the kind of support you want from family and friends and write an emotional wish-list to help communicate your thoughts and feelings
- Share practical tasks that family and friends can help with include cooking meals to put in the freezer, helping with laundry and helping with school pick-ups if they have other children
- Allocate one friend or family member to be the first point of contact to update other family members with any news or information on the baby, or set up a WhatsApp group, if parents are overwhelmed with people asking questions about their baby's health



5. NHS. Keeping fit and healthy with a baby. [online] Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/support-and-services/keeping-fit-and-healthy-with-a-baby/> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2022]

6. Bliss. How you might feel when you go home. [online] Available at: <https://www.bliss.org.uk/parents/going-home-from-the-neonatal-unit/how-you-might-be-feeling-when-you-go-home> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2022].

7. NHS. Patient information factsheet. [online] Available at: <https://www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Neonatal/Mental-wellbeing-support-on-the-neonatal-intensive-care-unit-NICU-2291-PIL.pdf> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2022].

8. NHS. Patient information factsheet. [online] Available at: <https://www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Neonatal/Mental-wellbeing-support-on-the-neonatal-intensive-care-unit-NICU-2291-PIL.pdf> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2022].

9. NHS. Patient information factsheet. [online] Available at: <https://www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Neonatal/Mental-wellbeing-support-on-the-neonatal-intensive-care-unit-NICU-2291-PIL.pdf> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2022].

10. NHS. Patient information factsheet. [online] Available at: <https://www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Neonatal/Mental-wellbeing-support-on-the-neonatal-intensive-care-unit-NICU-2291-PIL.pdf> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2022].