

Fact Sheet

Caring for your early or small baby in hospital and at home (Late preterm and small for gestational age infants)

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- Babies born between 34 and 37 weeks are known as 'late preterm infants'. They are usually well and healthy but not quite fully developed.
- They need a little extra help in hospital and when they first go home. Sometimes a short stay in special care nursery is necessary.
- The information below describes how we will support you to help your baby achieve healthy growth and development.
- Babies born around the time they are due, but weigh less than 2500gms are known as 'small for gestation age'. These small babies may also need extra support with some of the challenges below.

Keeping warm

- Small babies have trouble keeping their body temperature normal. They have less body fat, and are less active than bigger babies.
- They may need an extra heat source like an incubator or warming bed to keep warm in the early days after birth.
- 'Skin to skin' contact with your baby as often as possible helps to keep baby's temperature and blood sugar level normal. If this is not possible, warm clothes and extra blankets will be needed.

Feeding

- Offer your baby a feed within the first hour after birth and then at least every 3 hours, day and night - **at least 8 feeds in 24 hours.**
- Small babies have a weaker suck despite how they look when feeding. This is because their cheek muscles are not fully developed.
- We recommend you to express breast milk after each feed (for the first few days) so that you make plenty of breast milk. You can offer the milk you express to baby after breastfeeds.

Breathing

- Babies sometimes need oxygen and extra support to breathe after birth.
- They may also need medicine to help with keeping breathing regular. Nurses and doctors will track your baby's breathing until it is normal.

Jaundice

- Jaundice (yellow colour of the skin and eyes) can be caused by an immature liver. This leads to high levels of bilirubin in baby's blood.
- Your baby will have regular jaundice testing and may need to be treated with a blue light (phototherapy).
- Phototherapy can be given on the postnatal ward or in the special care nursery depending on severity.
- Testing may continue after you go home. If jaundice is not treated your baby may have serious health complications.
- For more information click on the QR code for links to our factsheets



Jaundice in Newborns



Phototherapy at Home

Low blood sugar (glucose) level

- Energy stores are important for your baby. Glucose, (a sugar), is needed for maintaining normal body temperature or being alert for feeding.
- Sometimes **glucose** in the form of a gel or a 'drip' is used to keep the blood sugar level normal.
- Recognising and responding to babies early feeding cues will help keep energy stores normal.
- Stirring with small mouth movements, stretching, licking and bringing hands to mouth are all signs to start feeding again. Your baby may look sleepy and not act hungry however needs to feed.
- Offering baby expressed breast milk or a breast milk substitute after feeding will help keep their blood sugar level normal.

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Infection

- There is a risk that your baby may get an infection during pregnancy or birth as your baby's immune system is underdeveloped.
- The symptoms of infection are the same as mentioned above, such as low temperature, breathing problems or jaundice.
- It is important that baby is screened and treated for infection and this may need a longer hospital stay.

Body posture and positioning

- You may need to give extra support to baby's head, arms and legs when you hold baby especially while feeding.
- Your baby is more likely to over stretch and sometimes have trouble moving into comfortable positions.
- During sleep, wrap your baby in a way which supports their legs and arms curled in towards their body. This will help your baby feel calm and promote sleep.

When can I take my baby home?

- When your baby is feeding well and doesn't need medical care, you and your baby may go home together.
- If your baby becomes tired and needs help with feeding or is unwell, they may need to be admitted to special care nursery (SCN). In this situation, discharge may be delayed.

Discharge from SCN will depend on your baby:

- having normal and stable blood sugar levels
- staying warm and without needing extra heating
- feeding adequately
- breathing normally with a normal heart rate
- Putting on weight.

Managing at home

The challenges mentioned may continue once you and baby are at home. Before leaving hospital, learn about signs of a healthy baby from the nurses and midwives. Regular check-ups will help to ensure your baby thrives during the early weeks.

Main points to remember:

- **Keep baby warm-** the back of baby's neck should feel warm. Dress baby with extra layers of clothing & wraps. Normal temperature is between 36.5°C & 37.4 °C.
- **Feeding-** baby may become more wakeful once you are home, a sign your baby is growing and maturing. Responding to baby's early feeding cues will help keep energy stores normal. Expressing after some feed will help you to make more milk to meet your baby's needs.
- **'Tummy time'**- for a short time when awake helps with baby's development. This may only be for a minute or two at first. Change position if baby appears uncomfortable.
- **Follow up-** contact your local Child and Family Health nursing service soon after arriving home. For support with feeding, scan the QR code for your **local Breastfeeding Clinic**.



- Take your baby to see your **GP in the first week** if you are not asked to see a paediatrician for follow up.
- **Ongoing health** - Please also refer to the information provided on the fact sheet Signs of a well-baby.



Signs of a well-baby Factsheet

For more factsheets visit our website

<https://www.wslhd.health.nsw.gov.au/wnh/home/home> or scan the QR code below



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wslhd-wmdwnhwebsite@health.nsw.gov.au

