



Soothing a Baby in the NICU: Tips for Parents

▶ THE BASICS

- **Get centered.** Since NICU babies can be jittery and fussy, it helps if you're calm. Take deep breaths and try to project comfort and security.
- **Talk before touch.** Use a soft, calm voice to greet your baby before you touch him or her.
- **Let sleeping babes lie.** Don't wake your baby up. Save cuddle time for later.
- **Be gentle and firm.** When you hold your NICU baby, use firm pressure — your baby may find this reassuring and soothing. When you put your baby back down in the crib, position your baby's body firmly. The weight of your hand and your baby's own body can help with relaxation.
- **Try a C-position.** Hold or position your newborn in a C-shape curl, as shown in the photo.

This C-position — body slightly tucked, with legs tilted up at the hip — may soothe and relax your baby.



- **Keep things calm.** NICU babies need a soothing environment. Do the following:
 - Keep the lights low — and music and voices soft.
 - Limit the number of people your baby interacts with.
- **Stick to a schedule.** Establish a routine of feedings, diaper changes, and so on. For a newborn, predictable is comfortable.
- **Respond sooner, rather than later.** It's easier to soothe a baby who's just starting to fuss, rather than one who has escalated into a full-blown upset.
- **Anticipate.** For example, if it's almost time for your baby to eat, get settled for a feeding.
- **Prioritize.** If your baby is crying with hunger, feed first — change the diaper later.

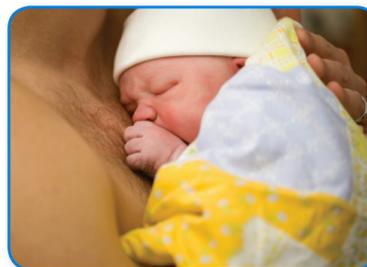
▶ FEEDING TIPS

- **Feed regularly.** NICU babies are working hard to grow and develop. They need the fuel! Stick to the schedule your baby's doctor recommends.
- **Offer your baby something to suck on.** In between feedings, let your baby suck on a hand or a pacifier. Many babies can learn to soothe themselves this way.
- **Keep feeding time calm.** Newborns feed better when they're relaxed. Keep lights and noise down low — and start the feeding before your baby is frantic with hunger.
- **Try this soothing set-up** for your baby's feedings:
 - Swaddle your baby as your baby's caregivers have shown you.
 - If you're feeding from a bottle, use a low-flow or slow-flow nipple — this will help keep your baby from drinking too quickly and then throwing up.

This calm, swaddled, side-lying baby is feeding well.



This baby is enjoying some skin-to-skin contact and a gentle massage.



▶ STRATEGIES FOR SOOTHING A FUSSY BABY

As you try to calm your baby, pay attention to your own feelings. If you find yourself getting frustrated or anxious, pass your baby to another caregiver. It's hard to soothe your baby if you're upset, too.

- **Vertical rocking.** This movement soothes a baby's neurologic system.
 - Hold your baby in the C-position in front of you. Your baby can face in or out.
 - Slowly and rhythmically rock the baby up and down.

A gentle, rhythmic vertical rock may comfort your baby.



- **Provide smooth, rhythmic strokes.** Gently massage your baby's skin and muscles with smooth strokes. (This is great to try when you are holding your baby skin-to-skin on your chest.) See if you can feel your baby start to relax — it will probably relax you, too!
- **Head-to-toe swaying.**
 - With your baby swaddled and held in the C-position in your arms, gently sway, shifting your weight from one foot to the other. (Note that this isn't a back-and-forth swing, but rather a swaying rhythm that moves the baby in a slight figure-eight motion.)
- **DON'Ts and DO's for soothing.**
 - Don't rock or swing your baby side to side. Instead, go up and down slowly, as in the vertical rocking, or sway gently as explained above.
 - Don't talk loudly into your baby's face. Stick to a gentle shushing or humming.
 - Don't move too fast or too erratically. Gentle, rhythmic movement will help your baby settle.