

After Your Baby Leaves the NICU

The first 4 months after your due date

This handout explains basic skills your baby will be learning in the first 4 months after your due date.

Why do we need this handout?

Babies born preterm (more than 3 weeks early) often need extra support after they leave the NICU. They may need help learning skills such as eating, moving, interacting with people, or playing.

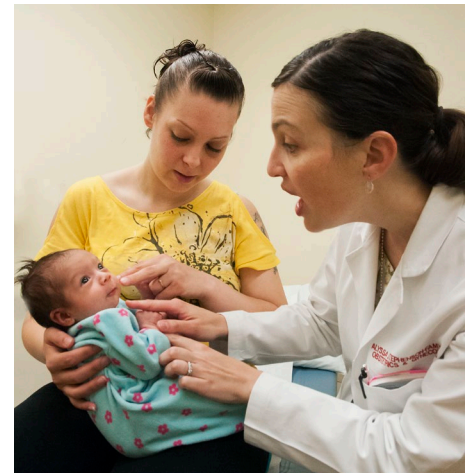
Full-term babies who needed NICU care may also need extra support as they grow. Talk with your baby's healthcare providers and therapists about any concerns you have about your child.

What is included in this handout?

This handout is a basic guide for your baby's first 4 months. It includes:

- Typical stages in a baby's feeding skills, language skills, movement skills, and sensory skills
- Signs your baby may need help from a therapist
- Resources to find a therapist who can help you care for your baby at home

We hope that you find this handout helpful. If you have questions or concerns, please call us at 206.598.4606 and ask to talk with a *developmental therapist*.



Talk with your pediatrician if you have any concerns about your baby.

What is my baby's "corrected age?"

Your baby's *corrected age* is counted from your due date, not from their actual date of birth. Always use your baby's corrected age, not

their actual age, when you are checking their skill levels and milestones.

Feeding and Nutrition for 0 to 4 Months Corrected Age

Typical Feeding

Breastmilk or formula feedings, or both:

- Feedings usually last about 15 minutes or less, and no longer than 20 to 30 minutes.
- Both parent and baby enjoy feedings

Typical Intake

Intake may be based on your baby's plan with a nutritionist. Here are usual amounts babies eat:

- **0 to 1 month, corrected age:** 6 to 8 feeds a day, 2 to 5 oz. of breast milk or formula at each feed
- **1 to 2 months, corrected age:** 5 to 7 feeds a day, 3 to 6 oz. of breast milk or formula at each feed
- **2 to 3 months, corrected age:** 4 to 7 feeds a day, 4 to 7 oz. of breast milk or formula at each feed
- **3 to 4 months, corrected age:** 4 to 6 feeds a day, 6 to 8 oz. of breast milk or formula at each feed

How can therapy help at this stage?

Therapy can help if your baby:

- Does not enjoy feeding times
- Takes longer than 30 minutes to finish feeding
- Coughs, chokes, or gags during feeds
- Dribbles milk or formula out of their mouth while feeding
- Spits up and seems uncomfortable or in pain during or after feeds
- Has little or no interest in breast or bottle, does not seem hungry
- Starts to eat but then stops, pushes away, and will not finish feed
- Opens their mouth to start feed, but doesn't suck
- Sounds congested during or after eating
- Breathes hard, pauses, or stops breathing while eating
- Is sick often, when no one else in the family is sick

- Is not gaining weight well
- Has sudden changes in eating patterns or has problems eating
- Does not want to eat solid foods by 8 months corrected age

What if I have feeding concerns?

- Talk with your baby’s provider about your concerns as soon as you can.
- Ask your baby’s provider to refer you to an infant feeding therapist.
- If you have questions or need help finding a feeding therapist in your area, please call UWMC’s feeding therapist at 206.598.4606.
- Take the questionnaire on the Feeding Matters website at www.feedingmatters.org:
 - Scroll down to “Is mealtime a struggle?” and click on “Take our questionnaire.”
 - You can print your results to share with your baby’s provider or feeding therapist.



It is typical for babies to make eye contact and to smile and laugh.

Language Skills for 0 to 4 Months Corrected Age

Typical Skills

- Makes eye contact and keeps eye contact with you
- Responds to sounds and voices
- Cries to get attention
- Shows feelings through changes in tone of voice or cry
- Coos during play with parent
- Smiles and laughs
- Shows increased excitement around people

How can therapy help at this stage?

Therapy can help if your baby:

- Does not make or keep eye contact
- Does not respond to sounds or parent’s voice
- Likes objects more than people
- Does not coo, smile, laugh, change their tone of voice, or cry

Movement Skills for 0 to 4 Months Corrected Age

Typical Skills

- Holds head straight, turns head to left and right equally
- Rests with arms and legs relaxed, hands are usually open
- Moves arms and legs in all different ways
- Looks at hands, brings hands to mouth, clasps hands together
- Able to lie on tummy, pushes up with arms during tummy time
- Slowly learns to lift head up when on tummy, does not arch backward
- Can lie on their back, reaches for toys held at or above chest, tucks legs up, starts reaching hands toward knees

How can therapy help at this stage?

Therapy can help if your baby:

- Holds their head to one side (rotated or tilted), or likes to turn head to only one side
- Stiff, jerky motions with their arms and legs
- Moves one side of their body, or one arm or leg more or in different ways than the other side
- Holds their hands in fists, does not reach for toys, or holds one or both arms tucked into body
- Only kicks their legs together at the same time, does not alternate legs kicking (no “bicycle kicks”)
- Pushes or holds their legs straight, “likes to stand,” or “feels really strong”
- Often arches their back and neck (pulls backward), holds arms behind body
- Does not like tummy time
- Lifts their arms and legs off the surface or arches their back when placed on tummy
- Feels “floppy” or does not move much without your help
- Needs lots of support to hold their head steady or does not lift their head
- Surprises you by doing advanced skills like rolling over or standing



Young babies are very interested in faces, people, and lights.

Sensory Skills for 0 to 4 Months Corrected Age

Typical Skills

- May need your help to soothe or stay calm
- Responds to you and calms most of the time when you help
- Is happy or content in most places, whether in a quiet house or a busy store
- Can sleep soundly, at regular times, and for a few hours at a time
- Responds to changes in their surroundings: lights, sounds, touches, motions, and smells
- Interested in caregivers, toys, and movement. Playful or excited.

How can therapy help at this stage?

Therapy can help if your baby:

- Often has a hard time sleeping.
- Has a hard time calming with help, or cannot calm with anyone other than a primary caregiver.
- Fusses in busy places where there are lots of people or sounds.
- Fusses when moving. Does not like movement or rocking.
- Has trouble holding their head steady when it is tilted back or to the side
- Fusses when touching or mouthing different textures.
- Does not seem interested in caregivers, toys, or movement. Does not seem to get excited to play.

What if I have questions or concerns about my baby's development?

If you have concerns:

- Tell your baby's healthcare provider.
- Ask your baby's provider for a referral to a pediatric therapist who can assess your baby's skills.
- You can also self-refer your child to *early intervention services* (see "What are early intervention services?" below).
- Call our NICU therapy team at 206.598.4606 to talk about your concerns. We can help you find local resources to help.



Talk with your baby's provider if you have any concerns about your baby's development.

Please also visit the Pathways website at www.pathways.org. The site has free resources to help you understand, track, and encourage your baby's milestones for the best possible outcomes.

What are early intervention services?

Early intervention services help families with children up to 3 years old who have delays or differences in their development.

You do **not** need a doctor's referral to have your child assessed by early intervention services. These services may help you:

- Find the best resources for your child
- Understand your child's development
- Support your child's learning and growth

How to Find Early Intervention Services

If you live:

- In **Washington state**, call Within Reach at 800.322.2588
- In **Alaska**, visit <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dsds/pages/infantlearning>
- In **Idaho**, visit www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/?TabId=78
- In **Montana**, visit www.dphhs.mt.gov/dsd/homebasedservicestofamilies/earlyinterventionservices.shtml and click on "Developmental Disabilities Program"

Questions?

If there is something you do not understand, please ask questions. Every question you ask is important!

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit:
206.598.4606