

Lucy's Journey

A NICU alumni story

From Lucy's Mom:

LUCY WAS BORN after my water broke following a routine doctor's appointment. At first, I struggled with a lot of guilt about her birth. It took me a long time to understand that this wasn't my fault. I grieved the loss of being pregnant, having a baby shower, packing a bag for the hospital, and leaving the hospital with our baby.

Early on, I struggled to understand the terms and processes in the NICU. My husband and I attended rounds every day so that we could be part of Lucy's care decisions. Language that at first seemed foreign quickly became our daily vocabulary.

The thing that got me through our NICU stay the most was holding Lucy skin to skin as long as I was allowed. I read to her, sang to her, told her stories, or just sat quietly, feeling her breathe.

While Lucy's stay was fairly uneventful, we struggled greatly with feeding issues. I wanted to breastfeed, but it was so hard for Lucy and we had very discouraging days. But we felt very supported by the nurses and lactation consultants. I encourage any moms who want to breastfeed to let people at the NICU know – they are an amazing resource.

I think families often hit a point in their NICU stay when they see the finish line but can't quite get there. We had learned to care for our daughter, knew her noises and cues, and we wanted her home. And yet, I also started to enjoy being at the NICU. You get to know the nurses and staff well and it becomes your reality. I admit, even now, there are days when I find myself missing the NICU and being surrounded by such supportive people.

We were discharged 3 days before Lucy's due date. Walking out of the hospital with her is a memory I will never forget. We took Lucy on her first walk around the neighborhood and held our daughter free of wires and alarms for the very first time. It was amazing.



Lucy in the NICU

What is one thing you wish someone had told you about the NICU?

From Lucy's mom: I wish someone had told me that even with all of the hard days and sadness, there is something truly wonderful and magical about the NICU. It can be a really wonderful place.

From Lucy's dad: That so many people would be there to take such good care of our daughter.

What is one survival tip you would like to pass on to a new NICU parent?

From Lucy's mom: Follow your gut and try to set aside advice and comments from others. You know who you want to visit with, how much time you should spend with your baby, and how to get through this experience. Trust your gut.

From Lucy's dad: Remember to eat. It's surprisingly easy to get caught up in cares and snuggles and medical stuff and forget. Being hungry makes everything harder.

When we came home, Lucy was 100% bottle-fed. I really wanted to breastfeed, and I didn't always understand why it wasn't working, but I followed her cues. Lucy was always very clear when it wasn't working for her. Over time, it got easier. Finally, 2 months after her due date, she was 100% breastfed. Getting to this point was likely the biggest accomplishment of my life, no exaggeration. There were many feeds when I thought it was time to quit trying. But I pass on the advice I received: "Don't quit on a bad day. If you are going to quit, quit after a really great feed."

Lucy is thriving at home. She loves music, baths, books, walks, rides in the car, and still loves snuggling for hours on end. She is the center of our world. Looking back, we wouldn't change a thing.

From Lucy's dad:

Because Lucy is our first child, I wasn't totally sure what it would mean to be a dad. I hadn't quite wrapped my head around the fact that we were going to be parents. Then, when Lucy was born at 29 weeks and 3 days, I was suddenly a father, 10 weeks before expected.

The speed with which Lucy arrived made the whole experience surreal. Our first visit to her in the NICU was no different. By the time the shock wore off, we had settled into a routine – by far the most helpful thing for me as a NICU parent. It was oddly comforting to know which nights of the week I would spend in Lucy's room, and that if I got up for morning "cares" (nursing care), I'd have just enough time to run out for coffee before morning rounds. Over the course of her stay, the NICU became more and more like a second home – which made everything a little easier.

As we got closer to taking Lucy home, it began to feel like the goal was just around the corner, but that we couldn't quite get there. Then, suddenly, we were leaving the hospital with our daughter. Once again, everything was surreal. Not having her monitors was scary at first. And trying to make sure that she took enough milk was scary, too. All of her care was up to us, and was no longer backstopped by round-the-clock medical care.

But, we finally found our routine and settled into it. And because of our NICU stay, we knew a ton about how to take care of Lucy – she wasn't a brand new person we'd just met. As of today, we've transitioned almost entirely into "normal parenthood," which is quite refreshing. Lucy is happy and healthy and growing every day, and my wife and I are overwhelmed and harried and smitten with our little girl. It's everything we wanted.



Lucy at 8 months