



What to Expect When Your Baby Is in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)

The NICU is a specialized nursery for newborn infants who were born early, had a difficult birth, and/or require unique medical attention. The NICU is equipped with state-of-the-art medical equipment and highly trained healthcare professionals who provide 24-hour care to the babies in the unit.

The information in this resource is meant to help you understand some of the experiences you and your family may encounter in a NICU. Since Respiratory Distress Syndrome (RDS) can be a complication for premature infants, this resource will help to explain RDS and common terms you may hear.



This resource is provided free of charge by Chiesi USA, Inc. to families and caregivers of premature infants.

What does a NICU look like, and what might you expect to see?

Visiting a NICU for the first time may be an overwhelming experience. The room may be brightly or dimly lit and can be noisy due to the medical equipment present. The machines monitor each baby's health and sound alarms to notify nurses, doctors, or specialists if changes are detected. If your baby is being treated for RDS, some of the terms or equipment you may hear and see include:

- **Incubators or isolettes**—Enclosed cribs that maintain a warm environment for a new baby while isolating them from any germs
- **Monitors**—Measure and display information about a baby's heart and breathing rate and other vital signs
- **Lines and tubing**—A number of thin tubes that can deliver fluids or medicines to your baby
- **Oxygen therapy**—A baby in the NICU may receive oxygen therapy if they have lower than normal amounts of oxygen in their blood, if they are having difficulty breathing, or if they are unable to breathe on their own and require additional support
- **Nasal continuous positive air pressure (nCPAP)**—Using a small mask or a plastic tube that has soft prongs that gently fit in the baby's nose, oxygen-rich air is delivered at a higher pressure to help keep the baby's lungs and airways open
- **Breathing or endotracheal tube**—A tube that is placed into a baby's windpipe through the mouth or nose to help deliver oxygen directly to the lungs
- **Mechanical ventilator**—A machine that can breathe for your baby by delivering oxygen to the lungs through an endotracheal tube



The NICU can provide the specialized care and treatment needed for the tiniest patients

The health information contained herein is provided for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace discussions with your premature infant's healthcare professional. All decisions regarding patient care must be made with a healthcare professional, considering the unique characteristics of the patient.

Who might you see in the NICU?

Many healthcare professionals work in the NICU and serve as a care team for your baby. The following is a list of a few healthcare professionals you may encounter if your baby is being treated for RDS:

- **Neonatologist**—A pediatrician who has special medical training to take care of sick or premature babies and make decisions about your baby's care
- **Neonatal nurse/neonatal nurse practitioner (NNP)**—A nurse who has special training to take care of sick or premature babies and remains by the baby's bedside nearly around the clock. NNPs are nurses with advanced training that allows them to perform or assist with medical procedures, and help direct your baby's care
- **Respiratory therapist**—A specialist who is trained to provide breathing support for your baby, including managing breathing machines and oxygen therapy

Depending on the needs of your baby, the healthcare team may also include nurse practitioners, physician assistants, dietitians, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and other healthcare professionals.

What to know about RDS

RDS occurs when there is not enough of a substance, called surfactant, present in the lungs that helps keep lung airways open. Surfactant starts being produced by the lungs around week 26 of pregnancy, but premature babies may not have made enough surfactant yet, as their lungs are still developing.

When there is not enough surfactant, the airways of the lungs can have a harder time staying open. Over time, this can increasingly affect breathing. A baby with RDS may need breathing support and, depending on several factors, treatment can include oxygen therapy and other forms of therapy that may assist with breathing.



For oxygen to circulate, small air sacs within the lungs must remain open and filled with air. When there is enough surfactant present, this helps keep the air sacs open (left). When there is not enough surfactant, air sacs have a greater chance of closure (right).

How long do babies stay in the NICU?

There's no one thing that determines how long a baby may stay in the NICU. Some babies require care for shorter periods of time, and some babies need care for weeks or months. There are conditions outside of RDS that may influence a baby's length of stay in the NICU. Every baby is different and your doctor can advise you more on what you could expect.

What are some questions you can ask your baby's care team while they're in the NICU?

Having a baby in the NICU can be a challenging experience. To stay on top of what's happening and feel involved in your baby's care, there are several questions you can ask, including:

- Can I hold or touch my baby?
 - Can I stay with my baby?
 - What tests or procedures will be done today?
 - Can I breastfeed or supply milk for my baby?
 - What medicine is my baby receiving?
 - What is my baby's daily care plan?
 - What is my baby's prognosis?
 - Who can I talk to for support?
 - What can I expect in the short and long term?
 - What milestones should my baby be reaching in order to be discharged?
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Your family and the NICU

During your baby's stay in the NICU, it doesn't hurt to have extra help. You may want to ask if there are any resources or programs available to parents or families who have a baby in the NICU, as many hospitals offer special support programs.

Hospitals try to make their NICU family friendly and involve you in the care of your baby as much as possible because the NICU is your baby's home away from home.



For more information about RDS or the NICU experience, visit www.nicuconnections.com