

Premature babies

Caring for your premature baby

Babies are considered premature or pre-term if they're born before 37 weeks of pregnancy. Premature babies need extra care and most will need careful monitoring in an incubator while they continue to develop. When their respiratory and other systems are strong enough, they'll be cared for in the neonatal unit until they're ready to go home.

There are a myriad of reasons why a baby might arrive prematurely; it doesn't mean future pregnancies will follow the same pattern. Reassuringly, nine out of ten mums whose first baby was premature carry subsequent pregnancies safely beyond 37 weeks. You can get support, advice and further information at www.bliss.org.uk.

Bonding with your premature baby

Even the earliest premature babies are able to recognise your smell and voice. So although you may not be able to hold your baby yet, talking to them and sitting close by will help build closeness between you. If you're allowed to stroke and massage your baby, it can be a great source of comfort for the both of you.

Visiting your premature baby can be an emotional experience and it's natural to go through feelings of helplessness and anxiety. Be sure to get plenty of rest and eat well. There may be days when it's better to let your partner visit your baby while you take a proper break at home.

Your premature baby's development

Usual developmental milestones don't apply to babies born prematurely. A baby born prematurely will naturally face some challenges in their first weeks or months. But being born pre-term doesn't necessarily affect their development late on.

Their progress will depend on how far along you were in your pregnancy when they arrived and many other factors. With love and encouragement, they'll reach those milestones in their own time.

Feeding your premature baby

Expressing your milk is the best way to provide the essential nourishment your baby needs, as well as giving them the immunity boosting benefits of breastmilk. If you find that your milk supply fluctuates, cuddling or stroking your baby can stimulate milk production, as can expressing while close to your baby and expressing by hand. You may find a warm bath or gentle self massage helps. It's also worth experimenting with different pumps: there may be one that's better for you. It's natural to have concerns if your baby is born prematurely. If you've got something on your mind, why not call the experienced mums and midwives on our Careline team? You can reach them on **08457 623 628**, Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm, or on our instant online messaging service, Live Chat