

Premature Birth



A premature birth means that a baby is born before completing the 37 weeks of gestation. Premature babies are at higher risk of serious health problems during their short-term and long-term growth because their organs are not yet fully developed.

Short terms problems for premature babies

- **Respiratory:** Their lungs are immature so the bronchi will have difficulty breathing on their own.
- **Cardiovascular:** their veins, valves, and arteries are still too small, which prevent blood from flowing evenly throughout their body; their blood pressure and heartbeat will be low.
- **Cerebral:** absence of adequate oxygenation and changes in blood pressure that might cause bleeding to occur in the brain. They may also have blood problems such as anemia, jaundice (yellow eyes and skin).
- **Gastrointestinal:** Their intestines may still be immature or outside the abdominal wall, this can conduct to multiple complications, including difficulty to feed and gaining weight.
- **Immunological:** Their defense system against viruses and bacteria is not fully develop, so an infection in the blood (sepsis) could occur.
- **Body temperature:** under their skin they do not yet have enough fat, which makes it difficult to control temperature and stay warm.

Caring for your premature baby at home

- Keep the house clean to prevent infections.
- For the first few weeks, limit outdoor trips; only to visits to the pediatrician's or other medical follow-ups.
- Limit visitors at your home. Every guest should wash their hands before touching the baby, and always wear masks to prevent COVID-19 infections.
- Talk to your doctor about how you should give medicine to the baby, if is need it.
- Feed the baby, following the pediatrician's instructions. You can exclusively breastfeed

Caring at hospital for a premature baby

The hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) will closely monitor and treat any problem that the baby may develop after birth,



if any. The baby must stay in the NICU because maybe the infant system and organs is not ready to function without help. As your premature baby progresses, you can prepare for the big day of taking the baby home.

- Every time you visit your baby, you should wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, always wear a mask, and follow any protective measures required by the hospital.
- During the hospital stay, the baby will receive regular checkups, shots, and other treatments to protect the infant health. While this is happening, choose a pediatrician and schedule a visit. The baby may need healthcare from a Specialist Physician.
- Review the baby health plan coverage.
- Learn CPR (first aid) for babies.
- Make sure your car safety seat is installed correctly. Visit the nearest Fire Station to obtain the certification issued by the Fire Department.



your baby for at least the first six (6) months of life. If not possible, feed with iron-fortified formula as doctors recommended.

- When you are going to feed the baby, support and hold your baby's head and spine upright in a position higher. 
- Do not use the microwave to heat the bottle. You can warm the milk by placing the bottle in a pot of warm water for a few minutes.
- At bedtime, always lay your baby on his back on a firm surface. To avoid an accident, remove toys and loose bedding from the crib. 
- Learn your baby's behaviors and signals. Your newborn will cry to let you know that is hungry, wet, or wants your attention. Soon you will be able to identify the differences between your newborn's cries. Establish a routine for sleeping and feeding.

Long term problems for premature babies

- Problems in motor development, such as holding their heads, crawling, and walking 
- Vision problems.
- Aggressive behavior, anxiety or problems relating to others.
- Hearing problems.
- Cerebral disorders.

Social and Emotional Aspect

For recommendations, tools, and resources on how you and your family can manage any emotional and physical concerns that may arise during and after your medical treatment, please visit your primary care physician or contact the following phone lines:

First Health Call

1-844-347-7801

TTY/TDD: 1-844-347-7804

APS Healthcare

787-641-9133

References:

<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/prematurebabies.html>

<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000486.htm>

<https://nacersano.marchofdimes.org/bebe/vacunas.aspx>

Prepared by licensed Health Educators.

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