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Your Premie Is In The NICU – What Can You Do?

By Sjona Lindquist

Your feelings are tied up in that tiny little preemie bundle, and you have a hard time comprehending

this small, wrinkled resemblance of a baby that is attached to every conceivable contraption...could belong to you. But when your heart is broken in more places than you could ever dream possible, and waiting seems endless, you are harshly welcomed into the world of parenthood.

It is truly staggering when you consider that an average of 1300 premature babies are born every day in the United States. If you are reading this article, you are probably the parent of one of these preemies. With so many things in this new out-of-control world of "living" in the NICU, what can you control?

Be There For Your Premie

For you, the first thing you can control is being there for your baby. It may seem like you are standing around (in the way) not being helpful, but you are doing an important job. Your voice, your touch, your prayers, and your deep love is something your preemie needs and craves as he or she is trying to get stronger. Your baby can see you, hear you, and/or feel you. You are important and you are needed.

It is just as important that you are there mentally. Everything is so "out-of-body" and surreal, but you can begin focusing on the essentials of your preemie's care. Learn about your baby's routine, his reactions, and health limitations. Keep yourself informed about everything and you can then notice the small things that are overlooked in your preemie's care. You can then request that these things be taken care of from a knowledgeable perspective, not just as a panicky parent.

Knowledge Is Power

"Knowledge Is Power" is a common saying. An important one when you consider the fact that you are now your baby's cheerleader and coach for the rest of his or her life. Begin learning all that you can about your preemie and her specific medical needs now and in the future. Books, articles (like this one), your baby's doctor, reputable websites, and other experienced preemie parents are wonderful sources of inspiration, information, and education for you.

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It may seem difficult to find the time when you are so stretched, but go slowly when you can find that time and keep at it. Make small goals for yourself. Remember, if you set goals, you will get much farther than if you don't. You can do some of these things in the NICU at your baby's side.

Look To The Future

Last, look to the future. It may seem silly to plan out what kind of parent you want to be for the next 18 years, but long-term goal setting is a very worthwhile occupation for any parent. Right now as time seems to drag on endlessly, it is difficult to see that time will soon pick up speed and the years will fly by. Practice little things now, like patience, and it will be easier when your premie is older.

How are you going to react to your premie when he or she does something that makes you mad, upset, frustrated, angry, happy, or laugh? How will you discipline and praise your baby? What kind of

people will you let your baby be around, and not? Do you have any family traditions you would like to start? What healthy habits do you want to instill in your premie?

If you keep your mind busy with all of the things you can do for your new premie, then it is harder to fall into constant anxiety. Try not to worry (though it seems an impossible task) about "will my baby make it", or "what kind of problems will my baby have", or "I can't do this anymore", or "Is my baby in pain?", and whatever else is plaguing you. Stay focused on your goals, and keep your mind thinking positive thoughts even if you are tempted to do otherwise.

Remember, you are the best parent your premie could ever have, and your baby is depending on you. You can do it if you take one day at a time. At times you may even have to break it down by minutes taking one crisis at a time. You are not alone, and you can forge your way through this trial as many parents have done before you.

Sjona Lindquist is a work at home mom of 6 (1 angel) and she owns and operates BabyLinq.com Premie Store. BabyLinq.com Premie Store is a resource site and specialty shop for parents of premature babies. She offers premie support, bereavement support, and premie clothes. Some of the products include micro premie clothes,

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Premie dresses

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What Is A Premie?

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"Premie" is the common term used when referring to a premature baby. The dictionary definition of a preemie is "a prematurely born infant". A preemie is born before 37 weeks gestation while a full term baby is born at 37 weeks or after. Premies require a very different start in life, and this can vary dramatically depending on the level of prematurity. Micropreemie and preemie are the two terms used to help define the degree of prematurity.

To an NICU medical professional, a micropreemie is defined as a baby that is under 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ pounds (between 700–800 grams) and is generally born before 26 weeks gestation, but most people prefer to loosen this term up to include any baby under 3 pounds (1500 grams) or under 29 weeks gestation. Micropreemies require a lot of medical attention in order to survive, and many more micropreemies are surviving than ever before in history. The statistics for the survival of a micropreemie can range from 10–80%.

A micropreemie born before 23 weeks gestation has no chance of survival to 10%. Every day inside the mother increases the chances of survival for a micropreemie, and every week is a major significance continuing to push that percentage higher. This also lowers the numbers of short and long term health risks.

Some of the many difficulties that a micropreemie experiences are immature lungs, an underdeveloped digestive system, cerebral hemorrhaging, high risk of infection, incomplete feeding reflexes, severe anemia, neurological delays, physical handicaps, and long term health issues. Because of so many problems associated with being a micropreemie, medical intervention to keep micropreemies alive include biliblankets, blood pressure monitors, cardiac monitors, endotracheal tubes, isolettes, intravenous pumps & tubes, nasal CPAPs, nasal gastric tubes, nasal prongs, oxyhoods, oxygen saturation monitors, phototherapy lights, pulse oximeters, respiratory monitors, synthetic surfactant, temperature probes, UACs, ultrasounds, UVCs, and ventilators. So much more information is being made available to parents of micropreemies than ever before, allowing parents the opportunity to educate themselves on their micropreemie's needs.

The technical term for preemie is defined as a baby that is under 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds (2500 grams), though the general public chooses to call any baby under 7 pounds (3000 grams) a preemie. This is partially due to the fact that it is difficult to find clothing that fits these babies unless shopping at preemie stores for preemie sizes, so some parents refer to their little baby as a preemie. Another reason is that many people are uninformed about the definition of prematurity.

Statistics for preemie survival is greater than 90%. The medical requirements for premies tends to be a lot less demanding than those of their micropreemie counterparts. However, it can still be a precarious time and many premies may still be on much of the medical equipment that micropreemies need. A preemie is weaned off of this equipment as soon as she strong enough or is capable of

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handling many bodily functions herself, yet, many times a preemie seems to go back and forth for a little while.

As a preemie begins to steadily get stronger and medical needs lessen, it is soon time to go home. Many a preemie has been sent home with medical equipment that their parents have been trained to

use in case of an emergency. This is a scary time and an exciting time for parents because they are now in control, not quite sure if they can handle emergencies but desperately wanting to get down to the "normal" part of life, raising their preemie. These resilient, warrior-parents do quite well continuing to fight for their baby and are very in-tune to even the smallest details.

Many preemies continue to have health issues that they struggle with for the rest of their lives. However, as technology advances, some of these problems can be controlled with surgery, medication, and other interventions. This is a preemie!

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