

Premature Babies SIGNS OF COMFORT AND STRESS

YOUR PREMATURE BABY

Becoming a parent for the first time causes most people a huge amount of worry; the sheer magnitude of being responsible for this tiny life can feel overwhelming. When your baby is born prematurely and is admitted to intensive care, or the high dependency unit, all the specialist equipment, the tubes and monitors, the beeps and alarms etc. can cause that feeling of being overwhelmed to spiral out of control.

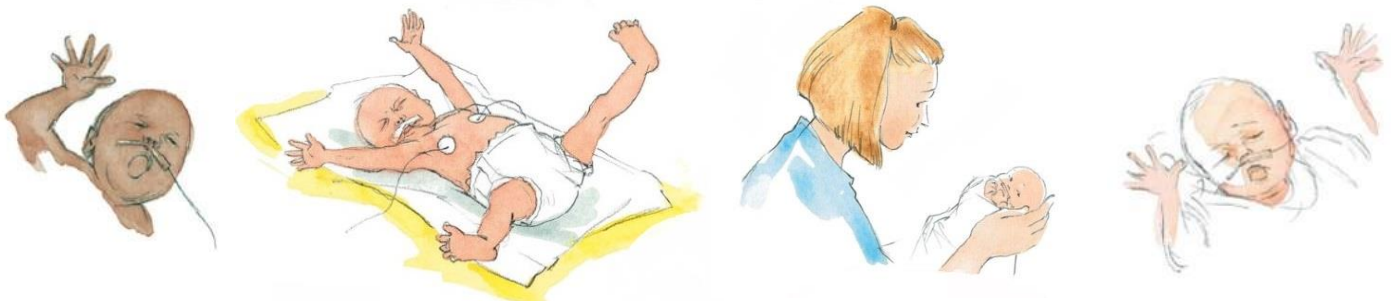


Your desire to be part of your baby's life when they are inside an incubator and you can barely touch them can make you feel like you have no part to play. This is not the case; your baby needs you just as much as any other newborn child.

Babies are capable of telling you if they are stressed or feeling comfortable; you just need to know what to look for.

SIGNS OF STRESS

- Your baby may arch their back.
- Your baby may thrust their arms and legs rigidly into the air.
- Your baby may be frowning or scowling.
- Your baby may spread their fingers and toes out.
- Your baby may be looking away because they are tired.



Images from "Look at Me – I'm Talking to You!" BLISS, the Premature Baby Charity 2006

SIGNS YOUR BABY IS COMFORTABLE

- Your baby is in a curled position; their body, arms and legs are curled up like they would have been in the womb.
- Your baby is surrounded by a 'nest' that supports them firmly. Tight spaces make them feel safe and secure.
- Your baby will have their hands near their face and mouth.
- Your baby may even manage to suck one of their fingers which they find very comforting.
- Your baby's feet will be together.
- Your baby will have support for their feet.



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HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR BABY

- Be aware of noise levels. Loud noises and sudden beeps can startle your baby. Keep your voice low and gentle.
- Be aware of light levels; your baby prefers the dark as their eyes are not fully mature yet. Unless your baby is under a UV lamp they are happy being inside the tent.
- Swaddling and correct positioning can help your baby feel secure.
- Massage and pleasant touch can reduce discomfort levels. Stroke your baby gently and slowly. Hold them close to your skin when possible.
- Be there for your baby when you can. When you are near smile at them and stay calm. Your baby can pick up on your anxiety so if you are relaxed they are more likely to be.
- Respect your baby's states of arousal (see 'Premature Baby: States of Arousal' handout for more information). If your baby is tired let them sleep.