

Patient information

Your baby's development: 31 - 33 weeks gestation

This is a factsheet to explain the developmental milestones you could expect to see in your baby at this stage of their development. Please do ask your neonatal nurses if you have any questions and you can also always discuss any concerns in regards to development on the ward rounds with the consultant paediatricians or physiotherapists as well.

Physical	Your baby may well show sudden, big, jerky outward movements of the legs and arms. As they are able to control these they will be able to tuck limbs in. The eyebrows and eyelashes are well developed. The finger nails are down to the end of the finger tips. The hair covering called Lanugo is slowly disappearing. The 'grasp' reflex is apparent and will be able to hold your finger lightly. The digestive system is able to tolerate full milk feeds although breast milk is more likely to be tolerated than formula. However, the 'suck, swallow, and breathe' mechanism required to take oral feeds may be a little difficult and this is why they may have most of their feeds through a naso-gastric feeding tube. Positioning whilst in their cot is very important. They do not have the active muscle tone in their limbs to be able to curl and lay in the fetal position. Boundaries and positioning aids are important at this stage to support your baby to maintain a good position and support their ongoing development, whilst there are settled in their incubators or cots.
Intellectual	The brain is growing fast; the front part of the brain goes through a major growth spurt. They may be able to focus on a picture or face from a fairly close range. They respond to the way they are touched. Photographs or black and white pictures can be placed into your baby's incubator/cot for them to focus on.

Emotional	Hearing is acute, your baby will try to pay attention to a voice, soft sound or face provided the surroundings are quiet and softly lit. They may well turn their head towards your voice/face in recognition of a parent present. It is hard to keep the neonatal unit quiet at all times but the medical staff will endeavor to switch off alarms and keep quietly spoken. We have a “quiet time” each day, where lights are dimmed and curtains are pulled, to encourage and support rest, growth and development for your baby whilst on NNU. Your baby may feel pain and if they do, they will express this through facial expressions and body language i.e. pulling their foot away from a heel prick. That is why prior to procedures, sucrose is giving as a natural pain relief for your baby. Comforting techniques are also used by nursing/medical staff and parents can be taught these techniques too.
Social	Early smiles may be noticed, these are usually when your baby is drowsy and content. Skin to skin (kangaroo care) is of great importance to both baby and parent, it enhances bonding, encourages weight gain and the feeling of security. It is of great importance that you facially interact with your baby when in a wakeful state, it is also important that your baby gets rest. Small babies tire easily and over stimulation can be actually harmful. Nursing staff can teach you the cues to look out for with your baby.

Below are useful for further information and support:

- www.bliss.org.uk Bliss aims to help babies and their parents at all stages of their journey.
- www.networks.nhs.uk/nhs-networks/eoe-neonatal-odn/parents-and-carers East of England Neonatal Operational Delivery Networks is for parents and carers provide further information on baby development.
- www.bestbeginnings.org.uk Best Beginnings have links to various pages that are useful for all new parents/carers. There are also links to helpful pages for parents with premature and sick babies.
- www.nct.org.uk National Childbirth Trust (NCT) provide information and courses for new parents.