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Welcome to Sunnybrook

*A newsletter for
Sunnybrook NICU families
and their friends*

Protecting your baby from infections

Keeping your baby safe from infections is a team effort, and you and your family are vital members of that team. Here's what you can do to protect your baby.

1. Take off any hand or arm jewelry (rings, bracelets, watches, etc.) Artificial nails must be removed; they harbour dangerous bacteria.

2. Remember **all** hand hygiene moments. Clean your hands after visiting the bathroom, after eating, after entering your baby's room, after touching your phone, after touching objects like books, equipment, or water bottles, and **ALWAYS** before touching your baby.

3. Cell phones must stay behind the curtain in your baby's room. **Never** use a cell phone while holding your baby.

Cell phones are a common pathway for germs. All objects that come in your baby's room should be cleanable with Virox wipes.

4. All your personal items should stay behind the curtained area of your baby's room

5. Please do not bring food or drinks other than water into your baby's room. Flowers and plants also cannot come into your baby's room.

6. Please do not give equipment like pumps directly to another parent. Clean and give to a nurse to inspect.

7. Please use the parent corridor to enter and exit your baby's room. For reasons related to safety and to privacy,

parents cannot enter the central nursing area in each pod.

8. Please do not visit other NICU baby rooms; we encourage you to connect with other NICU families in the family lounge.

9. You can bring in clean blankets and clothes for your baby. Please do not bring in personal linens for yourself; we have sheets, blankets, pillows and towels here that you can use.

10. Last but not least ... **please never hesitate to ask anyone and everyone, "Have you cleaned your hands?"** By anyone we mean any staff member or visitor. Everyone in the NICU needs to follow the same rules. By working together, we will all help each other stay clean and stay safe.

Something you'd like to see in the newsletter?

We would love to hear from you!

Please email ideas to Kate, the Parent Coordinator, at kate.robson@sunnybrook.ca, or just let me know when you see me in the unit. I'm in Monday, Wednesday and Thursday or by appointment.



Learn about Baby Massage

Our popular baby massage classes will be continuing over the next few months. They are free to all NICU parents, and even if you've been transferred or discharged, you're welcome to come!

Classes are free and there are 8 spots in each class. Please bring a teddy or soft-bodied baby doll to practice on.

Cindy has been a registered massage therapist since 1985. She is thrilled to be sharing the benefits and techniques of baby massage with parents. You can reach Cindy by visiting her website at www.trimesters.on.ca.

The next class is Sunday, Feb. 24 at 1pm. Dates of other classes will be posted on the parent bulletin board.



There's an app for that!

We asked some NICU parents if there were any non-medical smartphone or tablet apps that they would recommend. Here's what they told us.

"I love Breathe2Relax. It's a simple, free little app that helps you manage stress by practicing breathing."

"I downloaded Transform your Life (by Cheri Huber). It gives me positive things to think about every day."

"I use Overdrive so that I can take e-books out from the Toronto Public Library."

"Netflix, Netflix, Netflix!"

"I use WebMD Baby. I ignore all the medical stuff and use it to track diapers, feedings and growth. I love the baby book feature!"

Please note that these apps have not been tested or approved for use by anyone at Sunnybrook.

Meet Maureen Luther



Maureen is a member of our wonderful follow-up team. Her official job description is "paediatric physiotherapist"; for parents that means she is our go-to person for questions about development, feeding and therapeutic activities. She will see all of the graduates in their first year in the Follow-up Clinic, but is also always available to consult with current NICU families.

Maureen says, "Those babies born preterm are amazing little people who continue to surprise and thrill us every day! With the care and support both in the unit and in the follow-up clinic, you, as parents, can only imagine what potential these babies will achieve!"

If you'd like to meet Maureen, ask your nurse or find her in the Follow-up Clinic. Her office is RM 242.

When Santa came to the NICU

The NICU can be a difficult place to be over the holidays, but it can also be wonderful.

Santa himself came by our unit, accompanied by his elves and his own personal tree! Every family who wanted to a visit got one, as well as a lovely photo as a memento.

Thanks to Andrea and the wonderful people at the Toronto Toy Tea, we had gifts to give out to all the babies and siblings, and thanks to Nick and Sandy from Oh Baby Magazine, we had treats to hand out to the parents as well. Sunnybrook's own

Doug Nicholson took gorgeous photos, which families said they would treasure forever.

A group of parents from our Family Advisory Committee were on hand to arrange a holiday party, and one graduate mom brought in a marvelous feast for everyone! We also were so happy to have designer cupcakes made by Winnie at www.sweetinvitation.com.

But we must take a moment to say a special, heartfelt thank you to Santa, who made it such a special day for all of us.



Santa with his elves (and tree)



Santa, his helper, and one happy family!

Getting in touch and staying in touch

We really value family feedback, and want to make it easy for you to share your thoughts and ideas with us. You are always welcome to contact our Patient Care Managers with questions or concerns, or our Parent Coordinator.

If you would like to stay in touch with us after you are transferred or discharged, you can

join our mailing list by emailing the Parent Coordinator at kate.robson@sunnybrook.ca.

There is also a Facebook group run by a graduate NICU dad called "The Sunnybrook NICU Families" group, which is a nice way for parents to connect outside of the hospital. This is not an official Sunnybrook group.

We also maintain a family & staff blog and would welcome your contributions. If you have a story to share, please send it to Kate.

And finally, we participate in a survey with a number of NICUs at www.howsyourbaby.com. We would greatly appreciate it if you could fill out the survey for us when you are close to discharge or at home. Our code is VON001.

"Feedback is the breakfast of champions."

Ken Blanchard

Closer to the Heart: A Valentine Celebration

We are excited to announce our first ever event celebrating Kangaroo Care and parental touch!

Our "Closer to the Heart" kangaroo-a-thon will begin on February 14th with a party (of course!) in the family lounge, starting at 11am.

While we want to celebrate Valentine's Day, what we really want to do is talk about Kangaroo Care, hand-hugging, encircled holding, and all the ways your touch can help your baby.

From February 14 to February 28, we will be asking you to keep track of every time you hold your baby, hand hug your baby, or do encircled holding with your baby. On the 28th, we'll add all of these numbers together, and we'll have another excuse to celebrate!

Keep your eyes on the parent bulletin boards, where we will be posting event details and some fun facts about kangaroo care. We will also be asking you for your comments; we really want to know what the experience is like for you, and what we could be doing to make things easier.



Who is enjoying this the most? Hard to say ...



Kangaroo Care ... did you know?

1. Moms and dads can both do skin-to-skin holding, also known as kangaroo care.
2. You don't need to worry about baby getting cold. A mother's body changes in temperature depending on what baby needs.
3. Kangaroo Care gives babies a better quality of sleep, which in turn fosters growth.
4. Try to hold for long periods of time (1 hour+). Getting your baby in and out of bed isn't restful for her/him. Talk with your nurse about the best time of day for holding.
5. Studies show holding babies skin-to-skin protects them from infections.
6. In 2003, the World Health Organization put kangaroo care on its list of endorsed practices.
7. Other studies show kangaroo care may help the brain develop and shorten the overall length of hospital stay.

Turning 1: a story from Finn and his family

On January 3rd, 2013, we celebrated our son Finn's first birthday. He didn't really pick up on it, of course, but it was another milestone we weren't sure we would ever achieve when we had him at 24 weeks + 5 days gestation, weighing 650g (1lbs 7oz).

Originally our plan was to keep the day low key. Even though it was one of the happiest days of our lives, it was also one of the scariest. Like most micro-preemie parents, we don't think back to the day of his birth as a day of joy and expectation. We don't

have memories of smiles in the delivery room and we weren't able hold our baby right after he was born.

But those are our memories of Finn's birth and not our son's, so we decided we needed to celebrate this special milestone as he deserved a party.

Given that an early January birthday follows Christmas and is in the middle of flu season, we were a little reluctant to invite too many people, so we opted to include

only close family and friends. We did also invite "his" friends from the baby group that we attend on a weekly basis.

The party was so much FUN! Finn didn't seem to notice the beautiful cake and presents; instead he was occupied with all the paper and aluminum balloons, and busy trying to get the attention of all attendees – just like a typical one-year old! Perhaps when his expected due date rolls around in April we'll let him try cake again.

Every January 3rd will be a mixed bag of emotions for us. Thankfully though, there is more joy than sadness, more happiness than anxiety. While the details of our son's birth will never leave our heads, our hearts have learned to celebrate his life on his birthday.

Heather and Dave Rambukkana



I've
Come
a Long
Way!



October 19, 2012
6 months corrected
(9.5 months old)
6,555g (14 lbs 7oz)
= 10x my Birth Weight
(650g)




January 24, 2012
27 wks + 5 days
(3 weeks old)
821g (1lb 13oz)

January 3, 2012
8.5 months corrected
(12 months old)
7,257g (16 lbs)

January 31, 2012
28 wks + 5 days
(4 weeks old)
902g (2lbs)

Talking about Transfer

For most of our families, the first step toward home is **transfer to another hospital**. Level II hospitals care for babies who do not need full neonatal intensive care but still need support as they grow. Babies are transferred to be closer to your family home, when they don't need our level of care any more, and when a bed is available at the Level II hospital.

Transfer can feel stressful, but try to think of it as a positive step on the road to home. There is a bulletin board in the parent corridor with maps and information about Level II hospitals, sometimes known as "special care nurseries."

We asked some graduate families for some tips about transfer, and here's what they said.

"The new hospital may be different, but different doesn't mean worse. After a couple of days we realized the level of care was what our daughter needed, and we were able to relax."

"Even though we were at a different hospital, we did exactly what we were doing at Sunnybrook. We spent a lot of time at the hospital,

asked a lot of questions, and were very vocal with the team. We ended up having a great experience."

"Getting used to being in the same room with other families was hard. But we met some great parents and nurses, and the hospital was only 10 minutes from home which made breastfeeding much easier."

Reading to your baby

Some interesting research confirms that reading to your baby in the NICU will benefit both your baby and yourself.

A study from the McGill University Health Centre showed that parents who read to their preemies felt a closer bond to their babies, and were twice as likely to keep reading regularly to their babies once home. Regular reading helped promote listening and memory skills and stimulated developing senses.

Another study from Brigham & Women's Hospital showed that when babies heard their parents' voices,

they had fewer cardiorespiratory events. Parental voices are very familiar and soothing to babies, which may account for this finding.

While many parents read childhood classics to their babies, it doesn't really matter what you read. You can read your favourite books or magazines, or make up your own stories. The thing to remember is that your voice is good medicine for your baby.



Thank you to Amy Kinsler from Denver, Colorado, for sharing this photo

Getting over guilt: Thoughts from the Parent Coordinator

A few weeks ago, I was having a nice chat with a new NICU mother, when she suddenly said, "I feel like I was a bad mother even before my baby was born. I couldn't get pregnant and couldn't stay pregnant. Everything a mother is supposed to do I failed at. I feel so guilty."

My first reaction was, of course, to rush in with denials. There was nothing to feel guilty about! She was a great mom! She hadn't caused her baby's early arrival! But at the same time I understood where she was coming from, because I had felt the same way myself when my daughter was born at 25 weeks. I would hazard a guess that most parents in the NICU are carrying a similar burden of guilt.

It would not have been helpful for me to say to this mom, "Don't feel guilty," as if guilt were a tap that could easily be turned off or on.

So what else can be said?

I think it's good to acknowledge how common these feelings of guilt are, and what we can do when we start feeling them. A little bit of guilt can be inspiring. It can get us up in the middle of the night to pump, it can help us choose healthful food, or it can help us manage long hours in a hospital room.

The trick is to recognize when guilt stops being helpful. Is it keeping us from appreciating our new baby? Is it preventing us from feeling any joy? Is it keeping us awake at night? Is guilt getting in our way and keeping us from living life the way we want?

Let's put some practical strategies in place for those times when guilt is overwhelming. Some find it helpful to journal through these feelings of guilt, deliberately balancing every guilty feeling with a positive statement. Something like, "I feel guilty because my baby was born too soon", balanced with, "I know my baby really well and I am a good parent." Some find cognitive therapy helpful, or mindfulness meditation practice. Some connect with sympathetic nurses, some find support from social workers in the unit, and some find peer support most helpful.

Try reframing the story to recognize what went right. When I was talking with the mom mentioned above, we ended up discussing Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger who successfully landed an airplane on the Hudson River, saving everyone on board. He didn't get the airplane to an airport or even a highway, but he did get it to a safe place that was good enough. And he was acclaimed as a hero! So perhaps he is a hero that a

parent in the NICU can identify with; we may not have been able to get our babies all the way, but we brought them as far as we could.

When I find myself feeling guilty, I also think about some wise words shared by one of our graduate moms: "The only thing I can do is the best I can do. No more and no less. I told myself this every day at the NICU so that I didn't feel overwhelmed and out of control in a life that I had no power over." That mantra helped her get through her NICU stay and beyond. (You can read more of her marvelous post on our Family and Staff blog at nicublog.sunnybrook.ca.)

So if you feel guilt has a grip on you, take these steps. Recognize it, talk about it with loved ones or NICU support people, find strategies that help you feel better, and remember above all that you are not alone. You may not be able to turn the guilt tap off, but you can manage the impact it has on your life, and you can keep it from getting in the way of your relationship with your new baby.

If you're struggling with your feelings, let us help. Contact your social worker, or email Kate, the Parent Coordinator (kate.robson@sunnybrook.ca)

Calling all Dads!

Twice a month two graduate NICU dads come in to host a pizza night for current NICU families.

Sabir and Dave encourage all family members to attend. They'd also specifically like to invite NICU dads to come out. The NICU can be a pretty female place at times, and dads need an opportunity to connect as well. Don't be shy!

Pizza nights start at 7pm and are always in the Family Room. We'll post the specific dates on the bulletin board in the Family Room, on the Parent Coordinator's door, and in the parent corridor.

See you there!



Doesn't this look good? It could be yours ...

The next Preemie Picnic: JUNE 23, 2013

Whether you spend five months or five minutes in our NICU, you have a life-time invitation to this annual event.

Our next picnic will be on Sunday, June 23, from 12-4. It's at McLean House Park just north of the hospital, behind the Estates of Sunnybrook. RAIN or SHINE!

Thanks to all who helped this past year: Kraft Canada, Scholastic, Sunnybrook Foundation, Toronto Fire Department, Pizza Pizza, the Toronto Firefighters

Association, Monkeywear.com, Doug Nicholson, our NICU Physicians, the Linden Fund, ToroLUG, and Ray Anderson for his spectacular magic act!



Precious handprints



Loving the magician!

What is Family Centred Care?

Sunnybrook NICU

Central Desk Phone:
416-480-6055
Location: M Wing,
4th Floor, Bayview Campus

Newsletter Editor and
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Kate Robson

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The model of care offered in the NICU at Sunnybrook is known as "Patient and Family Centred Care" (or P&FCC). It means that you and your baby/babies are at the centre of the circle of care. Families are a key part of the care team and should always be treated as

such. That is why NICU staff members make a point of telling families you are not visitors – you have a right to be here.

The core concepts of P&FCC are:

- Respect and Dignity
- Information Sharing
- Participation
- Collaboration

We want you to be a part of the team, and we will help you in whatever way we can.

To learn more about Patient and Family Centred Care, visit the Institute for Patient and Family-Centred Care at <http://ipfcc.org>.