

I am 32-36 weeks gestation

Between 32 to 36 weeks I will be small. The staff will guide you when to touch and care for me. Over time watch how I move and react, you will soon recognise when I am calm and times when I need rest and sleep.

Try not to be frightened by any equipment keeping me company in and around the incubator or cot. Staff will explain these to you. You will notice that as I grow and get 'older' I will need less equipment.

Touching and holding me

Watch how I move and react now so that you can recognise when I am asleep or starting to wake. Avoid disturbing me when I am sleeping as this interrupts growth and brain development. I am able to tolerate touch. Prepare me for touch with your soft voice to let me know you are approaching. Touch me using continuous gentle pressure. Bring my arms and legs close to my body and my hands close my face. This mimics the position I would have been in the womb and encourages normal tone and patterns of movement. Hold me still, try not to rock me. When holding me in light sleep or when I am awake talk or sing to me in a soft voice. When you are finished holding/touching me, remove your hands gently and slowly from my body and avoid abrupt changes. The use of positional aids around me when changing my nappy will help me to feel more secure and contained. Kangaroo care, holding me skin to skin on your chest, is recommended. The staff will encourage you to do this. It's wonderful for me to experience this from both of my parents.

Sleeping

When I am sleeping, avoid waking me as this interrupts precious growth and development time. Avoid noise and bright light around my cot. Rest is important so that I conserve energy. Prepare me for cares by slowly placing your hands gently around me.

Light and noise

Talk to me if I am awake, but remember that this may tire me. Develop a regular pattern of care e.g. feed, nappy change, interaction, sleep and try to keep my bed space dark at night and dimmed daylight lighting during the day. This helps me learn the difference between day and night. Shield my eyes from bright lights. Provide opportunities for me to look at your face as eye contact is good for my brain development.

Feeding me

I will often wake and let you know when I am hungry however milk may still be given through a feeding tube as I still need to practice the co-ordination of sucking, swallowing and breathing and can sometimes tire easy. Breast feeding is encouraged as soon as I show signs of being ready to feed. You will have learnt what these signs are by spending lots of time with me but as a reminder they are:

- I may start to become restless and wake up before feeding time
- I may be alert and awake
- You might see me display the “rooting” reflex where I move my head towards your breast instinctively when I feel your nipple touch the side of my mouth
- I will be readily opening the mouth, showing I am hungry
- I have good tone in my body, with my hands held towards the middle of my body

This is called responsive feeding and involves a mother responding to her babies’ readiness to feed cues. Feeds are not just for nutrition for me but also for love, comfort and promotion of bonding between us.

Reduce care procedures and activity around me immediately prior to feeding in order to ensure that I am not too tired. Feeding is best when you hold me in a cradled position with my arms and legs tucked closely into my body. Try and keep the environment round me calm at feeding time. Shield my eyes from bright lights during feeds. Remember that feeding can be tiring for me at this stage, so whether breast or bottle feeding, I may feed well at one feed and not so well at the next.

If I am tube fed, provide opportunities for me to nuzzle at your breast, or suck on my own thumb or finger or a dummy as this will prepare me for suck feeding. Let me smell your milk by expressing a little spot onto the nipple before breast feeding as this will help encourage me to feed.

Positioning me

My movements will be smoother. When I stretch I will bring my limbs back to my body. I may need some help holding them there. When sleeping I will probably need to have boundaries close to my body in a 'fetal position' which will help with the development of normal tone and patterns of movement. Reposition me with gentle movements and avoid sudden changes in position.

Unsupported, Incorrect positioning



Well supported, correct positioning

