

## NICU: Playing with Baby

Your baby is constantly developing while in the NICU. One of the best ways you can help your baby learn and develop is through play. You can encourage your baby to learn through stimulating them with new objects, movements and games. While playing with your baby, be careful to watch for signs that your baby is becoming upset or overstimulated. Too much noise, light, items or people can make it hard for your baby to remain focused and calm.

### How to Play

At first your baby will be able to play for only a few minutes at a time. Check with baby's care team about the best time to play.

- Engage your baby through singing songs or playing music. You can add hand movements and actions to songs like "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" and "Itsy Bitsy Spider."
- Read or tell your baby a story. Your baby can recognize your voice and loves to hear you talk. Make silly faces during story time – your baby loves to look at your face!
- Give your baby toys that have different textures for sensory play.
- Allow them to explore the toys at their own pace.

### Signs That Baby Needs a Break

While you play with your baby, watch for signs that baby is getting overstimulated. If your baby has a few of these signs at once, let your baby take a pause or break from play.

Check for:

- Hiccups
- Arching of their back
- Sneezing
- Covering/rubbing eyes with hands
- Fussiness
- Flailing their arms backwards
- Spitting up
- Pulling away from you
- Very wide, open eyes
- Looking away from you
- Splaying fingers

Once your baby has calmed down and is alert and awake, you can try playing again.

For more information and support on overstimulation in babies and playing with your baby in the NICU, please contact your Child Life Specialist at 312.472.3201.

*Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.*

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Developed by: NMH Neonatal Intensive Care Unit