

Coping and Getting Emotional Support

Davina Frankhauser, Mother

I felt guilty that I had my son early.

Stacey Molin, Mother

So when I first saw my daughter Maya, I lost it. It was tough emotionally. I cried a lot.

Narrator

Having a baby in the NICU can be an emotionally tough experience. Moms are often very physically tired with hormonal changes and fatigue, making it difficult to manage. These feelings are not unusual.

Sue Hall, MD, Neonatologist

The signs that a mother might have post-partum depression include excessive fatigue, lack of interest in activities, even including lack of interest in her baby, failure to bond with her baby, not eating well, not sleeping well, crying excessively. This has to be distinguished from the usual baby blues that many moms do get.

Valencia Walker, MD

I think one thing we recognize is the NICU is probably one of the most stressful things you'll go through. There's having your baby, your most precious love of your life going through a tough time. And I think not only mothers, but fathers experience a lot of trauma and anxiety, and depression associated with it.

Narrator

These are normal feelings that many parents in the NICU can go through. Your doctors and nurses can help.

Valencia Walker, MD

We spend a lot of time talking with our parents. We really encourage them. You know, mothers will often feel guilty as if maybe they did something wrong, and that's usually never the case. And we also try to really reassure them, it's not your fault.

I think the other thing that tends to be really helpful is to try to get people to understand not to isolate themselves.

Stacey Molin, Mother

I never experienced a NICU before. I didn't know what it meant or what a NICU was. A social worker came in and talked with me a little bit more about what it's like to be a NICU parent it took me several days to wrap my mind around what that really meant.

Narrator

It's key that moms take good care of themselves too while your baby is in the NICU.

Lisa Grubbs

It's very important that they take care of themselves so that they can take care of their baby. Some of the things that they can do for that is get enough sleep. Good nutrition is very important for moms who have just had a premature baby. So sleep, nutrition, hydration.

Narrator

Becoming involved with your baby's care is also a good way to relieve the baby blues.

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Valencia Walker, MD

The most important thing is to connect with your baby. Change her diaper. Help the nurses take the baby's vital signs for your son. And then also talk to other parents.

Narrator

Bonding and breastfeeding is another great way to feel more involved with your baby's care. That nurturing is like emotional medicine.

Wendy Slusser, MD

Breast-feeding has been associated with a reduced risk of post-partum depression with women. In particular, when you breast feed you release hormones like oxytocin, prolactin, which are hormones that make you feel good.

Narrator

If you need help coping with your feelings, there are a number of parent resources available to you.

Peggy Kaufman

Fragile Beginnings Premie Parent Alliance is a regional support for premie parents, part of a national network for parents whose babies were born prematurely.

Davina Frankhauser, Mother

I had my son Brennan, he was born at 28 weeks, and we were in the NICU for 11 weeks.

Peggy Kaufman

Our group sessions are to meet the individual needs of the group people who come and it provides an avenue of connection, building relationships in the face of isolation.

Davina Frankhauser, Mother

After I had Brennan, there were no phone calls congratulating me that I had a baby. And I didn't hear from anyone, and the silence just made me feel, or I felt more shame.

Stacey Molin, Mother

I felt very close with my daughter when we were pregnant, and then all of a sudden we were very separate from each other.

Narrator

In the end coping with the baby blues in the NICU is about asking for help when you need it and taking care of yourself so you can take care of your baby.

Davina Frankhauser, Mother

I think one thing that is really important for new moms to know when their babies are in the NICU is that it's critical that they take care of themselves. Eating, making sure they're getting some rest, having somebody to talk to. Because you want your focus to be all about your child.

Stacey Molin, Mother

So from one mother to another, you can't be a good mom if you're not in a good place. So for me, it was about accepting help, and accepting help made me feel like I was being a better mom.