

For moms: How to take care of yourself

Taking care of yourself after pregnancy is really important. And, yes, it can be really hard to find the time and energy to do this. New moms have so many demands on their time. To make it easier for you, we've listed some ways to help you feel good and stay healthy.

What you can do for yourself:

- Go to your postpartum checkup and visit your health care provider yearly or as needed. A postpartum checkup is a medical checkup you get after having a baby to make sure you're recovering well from labor and birth. Talk with your doctor if you have feelings of sadness that last more than 10 days.
 - Get the flu and Tdap vaccinations.
 - Use birth control until you're ready to get pregnant again. For most women, it's best to wait at least 18 months between giving birth and getting pregnant again. Talk to your provider about getting an intrauterine device (also called IUD) or implant or using other kinds of birth control.
 - Eat healthy foods, like fruits and vegetables, lean meat and chicken and whole grains, like whole wheat bread or pasta.
 - Get to a healthy weight and do something active every day.
 - Take a vitamin supplement with 400 micrograms of folic acid in it each day. Taking folic acid can help reduce your chances of having a baby with certain birth defects.
 - Don't smoke, or use harmful drugs. If you need help to quit, tell your health care provider.
- Take any prescription medicine exactly as your provider tells you to.
 - Limit how much alcohol you drink.
 - Find ways to reduce your stress.
 - Share your feelings with your partner and family and make time to be together.

Get help from others:

- Ask family and friends to help out around the house or with other children.
- Visit [shareyourstory.org](https://www.shareyourstory.org), an online community for NICU families, where you can find information, comfort and support from other NICU families and the March of Dimes.
- Think about joining a support group of parents who have a baby with a health condition like the one your baby has.

Before you get pregnant again

Go see your provider when you're ready to get pregnant again. You want to be as healthy as you can be before you get pregnant. Let your provider know what happened with your last pregnancy. There may be certain treatments that can reduce your chances of having a premature baby or other problems with your pregnancy.

This resource includes some medical terms you may hear in the NICU. You can find out what they mean in the *Words to know* section at the end of this resource.



After my daughter was born, I felt so guilty knowing her early arrival was due to my preeclampsia. I felt like I missed so many moments; holding and comforting her, putting on her first outfit, and taking her home with me when I was discharged.

The NICU made me feel defeated and not quite like a parent. These were feelings and experiences that I didn't prepare for while happily expecting. I'm thankful that, with time and reflection, I've grown to know that my early experiences didn't define our family. We're not what happened to us; we are what we've become.

LAUREN

MOM OF A PREMATURE BABY

Words to know

birth defects — Health conditions that are present at birth. They change the shape or function of one or more parts of the body. Birth defects can cause problems in overall health, how the body develops or how the body works.

health care provider — Also called provider. The person who gives medical care.

microgram (mye-KRUH-grahm) — An amount of something, such as the amount of folic acid in a vitamin pill.

NICU — Also called the neonatal or newborn intensive care unit. The place in the hospital where newborns go for special care.

postpartum checkup (pohst-PAR-tuhm CHEK-up) — A medical checkup a mom gets about 6 weeks after she has a baby to make sure she's recovering well from labor and birth.

premature birth — When a baby is born before 37 weeks of pregnancy.

provider — See health care provider.

support group — A group of people who have the same kinds of concerns. They meet online or in person to try to help each other.

Tdap vaccine — A vaccine which offers protection from three serious diseases including pertussis (also called whooping cough).

vitamin supplement — A product you take to make up for certain nutrients that you don't get enough of in the foods you eat. It can be a multivitamin (a pill that contains many vitamins that help your body stay healthy), a prenatal vitamin (a multivitamin that has nutrients you need during pregnancy) or a supplement that contains just one nutrient, like folic acid.