

When Baby Needs the NICU

The Kuntz family in Rockford, Illinois, is eagerly awaiting the arrival home of their newest member baby Angelo. But unlike his older brother and sisters Angelo's pregnancy was anything but normal. A normal pregnancy lasts 40 weeks. Babies born much earlier than that are considered premature.

"We say anything 36 or below is premature."

"He was born thirteen weeks early."

Little Angelo Kuntz weighed two pounds, nine ounces at birth and measured 16 inches long. He was in a fight for his life from the beginning. He immediately went to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, the NICU.

"Babies come to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for a variety of problems. About half come because they're premature and the other half are babies who are not premature but have conditions such as difficulty breathing or surgical conditions that need to be repaired in the first hours or weeks of life."

"The fact that a baby comes to the NICU doesn't necessarily mean bad news. A good number of babies go to the NICU because they require close observation. Sometimes we only need to take an X-ray, sometimes we need to have a monitor, we just might need to give intravenous antibiotics, or a baby might need an incubator for one or 2 days."

Making the transition from living in the womb to living in the world is especially difficult for premature babies, "Preemies" as they're called because their organs are not yet fully developed.

Thanks to medical advances, children born after 28 weeks of pregnancy, weighing more than two pounds and three ounces, have almost a full chance of survival. Preterm babies born before 28 weeks may have more complications and require intensive treatment and support in the NICU. Exactly when a baby gets to go home from the NICU depends on many factors.

"Babies stay in the intensive care unit until they are physiologically stable to go home. I tell the families I'm going to keep the baby in the intensive care unit until the baby can stay warm without an isolette, eat everything by mouth without tubes and without IVs, and breathe all the time without help."

After many weeks of watching and waiting Baby Angelo is finally home. His family is thrilled! And Connie has this advice to share with other parents.

"Trust your doctors, trust your nurses, trust the respiratory therapists, trust the housekeeping staff at the hospital – just trust. This is something that's bigger than you, that's bigger than your baby and it's going to save your family."