

## What happens if you end up in NICU?

A stay in NICU, long or short, is never an experience anyone wants, but as we experience multiple pregnancies, it can happen.

Within NICU, there are three levels of care - level three for the most severe cases (intensive care), level two for the less needy babies who still need extra care or have specific medical conditions, and level one for babies just about to leave the hospital.

The unit at Waikato Hospital is one of six level three newborn units throughout the country. This unit caters for babies from Waikato, the wider Midland health region (which includes the Bay of Plenty) and sometimes babies are transferred in by ambulance or rescue helicopter from parts of the country where a Level 3 intense neonatal unit is not available, or the nearest NICU is full.

Recently I spoke to a Bay of Plenty mum whose newborn twins spent time at Waikato DHB in their Newborn Intensive Care Unit (NICU), and she shared some practical advice based on her experience.



### *Practicalities while your babies are in NICU*

- ✦ As a parent, you will always be welcome at your babies' bedsides, day or night. However, NICU has strict visiting hours and visitors are limited to two people per baby at any one time. And obviously, no one will be allowed to enter if they are sick.
- ✦ If your babies are in Level 3 NICU, they will be in an incubator and therefore won't be wearing any clothes. When they transition to a cot, they will be wearing clothes, but don't worry about buying premature clothes - NICU has massive amounts of clothes available.

- ✦ You can't room in with your babies at NICU until just before you scheduled for discharge. However, you will be found accommodation as near as possible to the hospital for the duration of your babies' stay.
- ✦ Expect to express every 3 hours - breastfeeding is encouraged. NICU have a 'pumping room' and a lactation consultant available.

### *Being discharged from NICU*

- ✦ If your babies' health allows, the NICU team will try to coordinate things so that they discharge both your babies at the same time.
- ✦ If that's not possible, the hospital will discharge one of your babies while the other stays in NICU. This situation can be tricky to coordinate, especially as once the hospital discharges your babies they cannot go back into the unit. You may need to arrange someone to help you look after the discharged twin so you can visit your baby still in care.
- ✦ Transitioning after NICU can be difficult. It can be easy to fixate on numbers - for example, how many millilitres has each baby had at this feed?
- ✦ When you are admitted, it is likely that the NICU team will take over your care from your midwife and you may not have opportunities for further contact with her. When the hospital discharges you, you will be eligible for a home care nurse for a period.

### *Looking after yourself*

- ✦ If you have an older child or children, it will be difficult especially with such a distance between you, your babies and the rest of your family. Perhaps you need to have a discussion with family and build a support network to help you during this difficult time.
- ✦ If you have your babies very early, you might not have started your antenatal classes, and it can be difficult to develop relationships with other new

mums, particularly as they may not be able to relate to your situation. However, you can make special and long-standing friendships with other parents with babies in NICU.

- ✦ If you are transferred to NICU from out of town (for example from the Bay of Plenty to Waikato), you can get breakfast, which volunteers supply, and evening meal vouchers.
- ✦ Remember that your babies' time in NICU will end - it may not feel like it at the time, but no child ever goes to school from NICU!

### *Resources*

Here's a few NICU resources and stories relating to twins spending time in NICU recently:

- ✦ The Southern District Health Board have a virtual tour available of their NICU.
- ✦ MidCentral DHB has a phone app called Babble that caters to the needs of parents with children at the neonatal unit at Palmerston North Hospital.
- ✦ <https://www.neonataltrust.org.nz/2017/03/21/neonatal-twins-celebrate-their-first-birthday>.
- ✦ <http://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/parenting/baby/73582091/BLOG-Double-trouble-Starting-life-in-NICU>.
- ✦ Please remember we are not medically trained, this does not constitute medical advice, and everyone's experience is different - if you are concerned about any aspect of your pregnancy, contact your LMC in the first instance.

*One of our members kindly provided this information; her fraternal twins were born at 28.2 weeks in late 2015. One twin was in NICU at Waikato Hospital until he was 42 weeks and the other twin spent a total of 190 days in the hospital. That's one amazing mama we have in our midst!!!*