

nicu Family News



The NICU Family News is produced by the Saint Barnabas Medical Center (SBMC) Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) Family Advisory Council (FAC). It is designed to provide you with information we hope you will find useful during and after your family's stay in the NICU.

DID YOU KNOW...

...Your baby **could** be ready to go home any time after reaching 34 weeks gestation (6 weeks before your original due date). To go home, your baby must also be able to maintain their temperature in an open crib, take all their feedings by mouth in a timely manner while continuing to gain weight, and pass the car seat challenge.

Enjoying Summer With Your Baby

It is wonderful to be able to enjoy the great outdoors in the summer with your baby once you are home. Here are some tips from other parents for having a safe summer with your baby:

- Don't overdress your baby. Dress him in what you'd be comfortable in, you don't want him to get overheated. If you're worried about him getting cool, carry a blanket with you.
- It is usually not recommended to use sunscreen on your baby until about 6 months of age, so check with your pediatrician before that first sunny day outside.
- You may want to buy a shade for the stroller to protect baby from the sun. The shades that come on the strollers don't usually offer enough coverage. A wide-brimmed hat can also help keep the sun off baby's head and face.
- Most pediatricians suggest you do NOT use insect repellent until your baby is 6 months old but check with them to be sure.
- You can buy a bug net for over the stroller and pack and play. You may also want to consider an inexpensive pedestal rotating fan for some air on the hot humid days and let it blow near (but not directly on) baby's seat/stroller. This can help keep baby cool and keep the bugs away at the same time!
- Make sure baby's room is cool enough at night but don't let the air conditioner or fan blow directly on the baby.
- It's very important for mom and baby to drink enough fluids to stay hydrated on really hot days.
- If you are carrying breast milk or formula in a cooler, don't forget to put an ice pack in with it so it doesn't spoil.
- If your baby is on medications read labels carefully and be sure to keep him out of direct sunlight if that's what the labels say.
- During the height of the summer, try to avoid being outside with your baby between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. when the sun/temperature is hottest.

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Saint Barnabas Medical Center



Interview with Nadine Vaccarino, IBCLC, RLC

Lactation Consultant

Q: Why did you become a lactation consultant in the NICU?

A: When my son was born he gave me a really hard time with breastfeeding. My pediatrician at the time sent me to a lactation consultant. Through my tears she taught me what I needed to know. I will never forget how good she made me feel about my ability to nurse my baby. I knew I wanted to help mothers the same way she helped me.

Q: What do you like most about working in the NICU?

A: Watching the babies and the families evolve. When I first meet the families, they are usually overwhelmed and insecure. By the time they leave the hospital they are beaming with joy. I love to see how empowered the moms who provide breast milk for their NICU babies feel. They tell me it's one thing they can do to feel a little less helpless.

Q: What are you most proud of?

A: Personally, my children. Professionally, the amazing staff here. I am in awe of the knowledge and expertise each and every one of the doctors, nurses and social workers have. I learn from them every day.

Q: Why is it so important for premature babies to get breast milk?

A: Being born prematurely can put the baby at a disadvantage from the start. Anything that can be done to give them a better start should be done. Breast milk is one way mothers can help. Preterm milk is higher in protein, calcium, iron and other nutrients. Breast milk contains several types of immunity factors not found in formula. It is also easier to digest. Studies have found that premature babies who receive breast milk may have shorter hospital stays, fewer infections, better bone development, brain growth and vision than babies fed infant formula. I could go on and on!

Q: What advice would you give to a mom who is having a difficult time breastfeeding?

A: Be patient. There are a lot of skills your baby won't learn overnight. Breastfeeding is only one of them. Breastfeeding is a "learned" skill for a premature baby. Just like bottle feeding. It may take several weeks of practice; be patient with yourself and your baby.

Q: What do you think of family centered care? What does it mean to you?

A: Family centered care is exactly what it says it is. The family is involved in the care of the baby. It is their baby. Eventually the parents are taking their baby home with them, and we feel a family centered care environment helps them become more confident parents. Our NICU staff does their best to encourage parents to be involved in their baby's care. Moms and dads can get some bonding time with Kangaroo Care. I feel the outcomes are better when everyone works together.



Nadine Vaccarino, IBCLC, RLC

Q: Can you share some of the SBMC NICU changes that you have seen over the years?

A: Communication has greatly improved. There seems to be more of a team effort including the parents. The Family Advisory Council has been a great source of change for the better. Their support and suggestions have helped the staff see things from the parents' perspective, which could otherwise be overlooked. Also breastfeeding rates are much better than they were a few years ago and staff has become much more supportive of the mothers' efforts to provide milk.

Q: Do you have any suggestions for parents?

A: Don't be afraid to reach out. No question is too small or silly. We are all here to help you and if we can't, we will find someone who will. That's why we are here.



A Father's Story for Father's Day

My twin girls, born at 29 ½ weeks at 1lb. 15oz. and 2 lb. 15 oz., spent 7 and 6 weeks respectively in the Saint Barnabas Medical Center NICU in the early summer of 2007. I never felt more like a father, husband or a "head of the household" than during our NICU stay.

As a man, if there's a problem, I'm programmed to fix it. I like to know I have things under control. And a stay in the NICU is not something that can be fixed or totally controlled. I thought about all the things that had to be managed outside of the NICU: my wife's recovery, understanding our insurance, my job schedule, visiting the babies, communicating with family and friends and giving my oldest daughter the "big sister" title even though her sisters wouldn't be home for weeks.

I don't remember much from my first NICU visit minutes after the girls were born. I'm not sure anyone does. But among all the monitor noise and baby cries, I do remember the neonatologist telling me it would be "one day at a time." It took a few days to come out of the fog that both my wife and I were in. I read some of the information the social worker had given us and learned the importance of hand washing. I learned about the monitors and asked questions when I didn't understand what the doctors or nurses were telling me. I learned to ask for help from my friends and

family and never said no when someone offered to bring over food or babysit my oldest.

I also slowly learned about family centered care. There were certain ways to hold and touch the babies. I could play music, take pictures, bring in clothes and blankets from home and tape drawings from their big sister on their isolettes. I learned about Kangaroo Care and that over time, I'd be able to take the baby's temperature, change diapers, weigh them and give them a bath.

All these things gave me the control I thought I didn't have and allowed me to help "fix" my babies, which wasn't fixing at all. It was letting them grow and gain weight in a loving and nurturing environment. Two years later, with three girls running and yelling around the house, it's hard to remember all that we went through.

I am especially grateful for the volunteer efforts made by the Family Advisory Council, which helps make improvements for NICU families. And, my entire family is thankful for the wonderful care provided by the NICU staff. They are all the reasons I joined the Family Advisory Council and NICU Buddy Program.

Happy Fathers' Day to all the present and past NICU dads. I hope you can find a few minutes of peace and quiet on your special day.

- Brad Schenker

SAVE-THE-DATE:

The 9th Annual Miracle Walk will take place on Sunday, October 4, 2009, in Verona Park.

To learn more or to sign up for the walk:

- > Visit www.miraclewalk.com
- > Email miraclewalk@sbhcs.com
- > Call 973-322-4259

You can also Find MIRACLE WALK on FACEBOOK.



Important Phone Numbers:

NICU

973-322-5300

NICU Step-down (3100)

973-322-5310

NICU Social Workers

973-322-5503 or 8408

Birth Certificate Office

973-322-5327

Want to Help the Family Advisory Council?

The FAC is made up of graduate parents dedicated to helping new NICU parents. We meet monthly to discuss ways to do this. We're always looking for recent graduate parents to share their experiences and ideas to make our NICU the best it can be.

We welcome your ideas and participation. Contacts:

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Family Advisory Council

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Nadine Vaccarino

Do you have the RIGHT car seat to take your baby home?

You will need to have a car seat to take your baby home from the hospital. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) can help give you good information about this. Go to their website at: nhtsa.dot.gov/CPS/CSSRating/Index.cfm -- look on the right-hand side under the heading **For Parents** and click on child seat ratings. Look at the weight/height limits to find the car seat that would best fit your baby.



Many babies are discharged from our NICU before they weigh 5 pounds so you may want to choose a car seat that is approved for infants weighing 4 pounds. You can read about many different car seats and pick the one best for your baby and your car. You can also ask the NICU nurses or your social worker to give you a brochure from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) on Car Seat Safety.

Once you get your car seat, install it in your car. To check to see if you've installed your car seat correctly, have it checked at an inspection station or by a certified child passenger safety technician. To find an inspection station near you, go to: nhtsa.dot.gov/CPS/CSSRating/Index.cfm -- look on the right-hand side under heading **For Parents**, click on child seat check sites, and then enter your zip code and state.

It Must Fit Right To Work Right! Remember, the best car seat is the one that fits your child properly, is easy to use, and fits in your vehicle correctly.

Tell Us Why Your Doctor is The Greatest

Saint Barnabas Medical Center is once again asking grateful community members to write in and recognize their outstanding physicians by participating in the "I Love My Doctor" Campaign 2009. The deadline is August 15, 2009. For additional information, please call 973-322-5425, visit saintbarnabas.com (select Saint Barnabas Medical Center from the facilities list), or email SBMCILOVEMYMD@SBHCS.COM. All recognized physicians and their patients will be invited to a special event planned for October 2009

