

Patient information

Information and support for parents after discharge

Introduction

Being discharged from the neonatal unit is an exciting time but can also feel scary. Before discharge, staff on the neonatal unit will provide support and guidance to ease this transition and to ensure that you are prepared for going home.

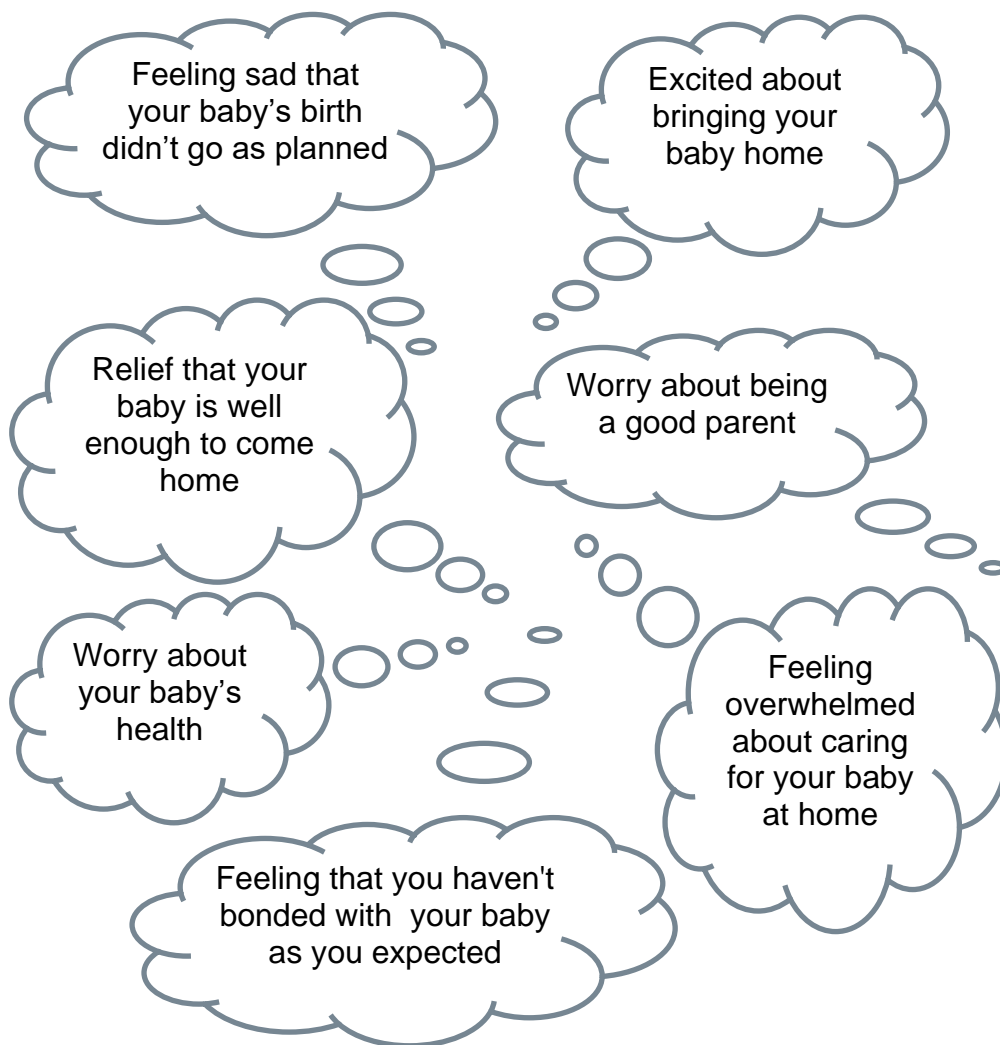
When you go home, your main focus will be on looking after your baby however it is also important to look after yourself.

This leaflet has been created to provide some strategies to cope with the transition to home after your baby has been discharged from the neonatal unit. It also provides some information on where to find additional support.



Thoughts and feelings

Having a new baby is a time of significant change for you and your family. Whilst your baby is in hospital, you have the support of neonatal staff to answer any questions or worries that you have. The thought of no longer having this can bring up mixed emotions. Some of the thoughts and feelings you are having may include: Having thoughts and feelings like the ones listed above is normal and common. They are likely to reduce after time, as you get used to caring for your baby at home.



Developmental milestones and corrected age

It can be easy to compare your baby's developmental milestones with other babies, especially in baby group settings however it is important to remember that each baby progresses in their own way and comparison can often be unhelpful.



As your baby grows, you may notice that reaching developmental milestones take a little longer for premature babies in comparison to other babies born at full term. This is because premature babies are younger and should be assessed according to their corrected age.

Corrected age is the age that they are from their term due date. For example, if your baby was born at 31 weeks and is 6 months old, they should be assessed as 4 months old. This should reassure you that your baby is doing well and also address any concerns that you may have.

These differences become much less obvious overtime, but can be something to adjust to during the initial stage of their life.

Looking after yourself

It can be difficult to cope with the lack of sleep and changes to your daily routine which comes with having a new baby. This can impact both your physical and mental health, therefore it is important that you also prioritise your own self-care and wellbeing.

Sleep

Your sleep is likely to be disrupted as your baby adapts to sleeping in a new environment. Here are some tips which may help you to cope with lack of sleep:

- Sleep when your baby sleeps: this is much easier said than done, especially if you have other children. You could ask family or friends to stay with you for a few days so they can help out and give you a break.
- If you are struggling to get to sleep, lying down can help you in feeling more rested and restored. You may eventually fall asleep after a short period.
- Cut out the caffeine: although caffeine can help in the short term, it may make it difficult to sleep when you have the chance to rest. It can also impact the quality of sleep.
- Some people can struggle with intrusive thoughts when trying to get to sleep. Be kind to yourself and try to let the thoughts pass. Mindfulness techniques can help you to cope with this (see *below*).



Physical health

Looking after your physical health is key to supporting your overall health and wellbeing.

- Make sure that you are eating well and often enough, combined with drinking enough water throughout the day. You could ask family or friends to bring cooked meals whilst you adjust to your change in routine.
- Try and get out during the day by doing some light exercise. Getting some sunlight can help you to feel more awake throughout the day.



Switch off

- Switching off your phone and the television whilst you are feeding your baby or resting may help you to relax.
- Leave any non-essential jobs: focus on looking after yourself and your baby. Any household chores that aren't urgent can wait. Use downtime to rest and relax.



- Staying connected with friends and family can help you to unwind after a challenging day.
- Remember that you are doing the best that you can, try not to criticise yourself if things aren't perfect.

Breathing exercises

Doing some simple breathing exercises can help if you are feeling panicked or overwhelmed. They can help to reduce the physical effects of anxiety by slowing our breathing down. You could try the breathing exercise below:

Balloon breathing

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
2. Place one hand on your stomach - you should feel it rise as you breathe in and fall as you breath out.
3. Imagine there is a balloon in your stomach. Breathe in through your nose and imagine you are blowing up the balloon whilst you breathe in.
4. Pause for a second, and then breathe out slowly. This time imagine you are letting the air out of the balloon as you breathe out.



Mindfulness

When we have difficult thoughts and feelings, we are often focused on things that have happened in the past. For example, you may feel disappointed that your baby's birth did not go as planned. Alternatively, you may be focused on what could happen in the future. For example, you may be worried that your baby will become unwell.



Mindfulness can help you to shift your attention to what is happening right now, so you don't get caught up in thoughts and feelings about the past or future. By practicing mindfulness often, you can develop a new habit that helps weaken automatic and negative thinking.

Apps like *Smiling Mind*, *Headspace* and *Calm* have mindfulness audios that you can listen to.

Alternatively, you can bring yourself into the present moment by just noticing what is around you. Work through your five senses by noticing:

- Five things that you can see
- Four things that you can feel
- Three things that you can hear

- Two things that you can smell
- One thing that you can taste

Do something you enjoy

Since having a new baby, you may find that it's more difficult to do the things that you used to enjoy however try to set some time aside so that you can reconnect with things you enjoyed doing before you had a baby. This could be something simple like reading a book or taking a bath.



Talk to loved ones and build a support network

Let the people around you know how you are feeling. You can speak to them about how they can support you and they may be able to help you take some time for yourself.

It can sometimes help to speak to other parents who have been through a similar experience. This can be reassuring and provide practical and emotional support. Coming to our *Neonatal Unit Support Group* for families who have gone home from our unit may help with this (see *below*).



These ideas may help you begin to feel better and the difficult thoughts and feelings you are having may begin to reduce over time however, **if you are finding things very challenging and it is not improving, you may need to find some extra support.**

Where to find extra support

There are people to speak with if you feel you need further support for your own wellbeing:

- Your **GP** or **Health Visitor** will be able to guide you to any help and advice you may need. If you are worried about talking to a health professional, consider asking a close family or friend to come with you for support.
- **Children's Centres** in Suffolk provide a range of services for families with children under five. This includes play sessions, parenting support groups, midwifery services, and child health clinics.
- You can self-refer to the **Wellbeing Service**, which offers support for mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression. The referral form is on their website: www.wellbeingnands.co.uk
- **Living Life to the Full** offer online programmes which provide information and

resources to improve wellbeing: www.lltff.com

- **Cry-sis** is a UK charity offering help and support for parents with babies who have sleeping problems or cry excessively. You can find the helpline and more information here: www.cry-sis.org.uk
- **EpicDad** is an organisation that focuses on supporting fathers, father figures, and families. They hold wellbeing workshops, days out, and parenting courses: www.epicdad.co.uk

West Suffolk Hospital support

- The **Neonatal Unit Support Group** is an opportunity for you to meet with other families who have stayed on the unit. The group runs twice every month in Thetford and surrounding areas. Activities include sensory play, parachute play and nursery rhymes. You can get updated on the upcoming events by joining the Facebook group '*WSH Neonatal Unit*'. See pictures of the support group on *below*.
- You will be supported with your discharge and transition to home by the **Community Neonatal Team** who will be involved in the discharge process and may provide home visits.
- **Birth Reflections** is a confidential midwifery-run service for mothers who have given birth with the support of the West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust. This service gives you the opportunity to discuss your birth experience. You can self-refer from six weeks after having your baby by emailing: birthreflections@wsh.nhs.uk



Perinatal mental health

Perinatal mental health is the overarching term for mental health during pregnancy and the first postnatal year.

It is estimated that 10 - 20% of women experience perinatal mental health illnesses however this is likely to be higher for parents who have experienced a neonatal stay, as they have an increased risk of developing anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



You can read about the signs of perinatal mental health illnesses on the NHS website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/support-and-services/feeling-depressed-after-childbirth/>

If you are struggling, it is extremely important to talk to someone about how you're feeling. **Please consider speaking to your GP, Midwife, or Health Visitor for extra support.**

Information on the **Perinatal Community Mental Health Service in Suffolk** can be accessed on the NSFT website: www.nsft.nhs.uk/service-details/service/perinatal-community-mental-health-services-in-suffolk-110/

If you are outside of the Suffolk catchment area, please approach your GP for more information on your local perinatal mental health services.

Useful websites for further information

- **Petals** is a specialist counselling service that provides bereavement support for parents. This includes counselling for traumatic births which is available through a professional referral: www.petalscharity.org/westsuffolk/
- **Mind** is a UK mental health charity. Their website has lots of useful information about different mental health conditions, including perinatal mental illnesses: www.mind.org.uk
- The **PANDAS Foundation** has a range of services designed to support parents experiencing perinatal mental illness. You can visit their website to access their services, or to find more information: www.pandasfoundation.org.uk
- The **Association for Postnatal Illness** aims to provide support and information for parents with postnatal depression. They have a helpline and online support available: www.apni.org
- **NCT** is a UK charity with information and advice for pregnancy, birth, and early parenthood. They also run classes in some areas: www.nct.org.uk
- **MoodCafe** also has information and resources about various mental health difficulties, including perinatal mental health: www.moodcafe.co.uk



Neonatal unit survey

Your feedback means a lot to us and helps us to improve our service. Please scan this QR code



If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (formerly DisabledGo)

<https://www.accessable.co.uk>



© West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust