Your Baby’s Sleep in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

Why is sleep important for babies?
Your baby’s brain develops while they are sleeping. They need sleep to:

- Regulate hormones for brain development and physical growth
- Store energy needed for growth
- Develop hearing, touch, vision, taste and smell
- Learn and build memory
- Develop the limbic system (the brain’s center for emotional learning about new experiences)
- Help keep vital signs, such as pulse and temperature, stable

Why do babies need plenty of uninterrupted sleep?
REM sleep (also called active sleep) only happens during uninterrupted sleep. Your infant needs plenty of REM sleep for brain development. During REM sleep, important sensory information is organized into permanent learning pathways and connections that your baby will use throughout their lifetime to understand the world around them. Uninterrupted sleep also helps:

- Conserve energy
- Lower agitation and stress
- Promote your baby’s growth

How can I help my baby sleep?
Below are some tips to help your baby sleep while they are in the hospital. If you have questions or concerns about your baby’s sleep, please talk to your doctor or others on your health care team.

- Be with your baby whenever you can but check with your nurse about your baby’s wake-up time. Allow your baby to sleep until then. If your baby is sleeping, get to know your baby by sitting and watching without touching. This will help you learn your baby’s cues.
- Warm your hands before touching your baby. Touch your baby slowly and gently, but keep steady pressure rather than stroking your baby. Keep your hands still until you are sure your baby will enjoy other kinds of touch. Just start by holding hands or cradling their head and bottom.
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To Learn More
• Neonatal Intensive Care Unit
  206-987-2041
• Ask your child’s healthcare provider
• www.seattlechildrens.org

• Talk in a soft voice, shut isolette doors gently and shade the baby’s eyes from bright overhead lights.
• Provide skin-to-skin care (Kangaroo care) to your baby.

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Free Interpreter Services
• In the hospital, ask your child’s nurse.
• From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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