

Early arrival, extra care

Navigating pre-mature babies

Having a premature baby can bring a whirlwind of emotions relief, fear, joy, and uncertainty- all at once.

There is no 'right' way to feel, and no set timeline for adjusting to this unexpected journey.

Support is here for you - whether through counselling, peer groups, or simply someone to listen as you navigate the challenges and celebrate the milestones.

Your emotions after premature birth

What to expect

It's normal to feel a mix of emotions after a premature birth - joy and love, along with sadness, anxiety, guilt, or confusion. Seeing your baby in the NICU can be overwhelming, and some parents may even feel anger or struggle to connect at first.

Feeling powerless, lonely, or unsure about the future is common, and leaving your baby at the hospital can be very hard.

Over time, as your baby grows and becomes more stable, you'll have more chances to care for and bond with them. The NICU staff are there to support you both and help build your confidence through this journey.

Tips for managing emotions

Managing Emotions

Accept whatever you're feeling, don't push your emotions away. Naming your feelings is healthy. Be kind to yourself and remember you're doing your best. Connecting with other parents in similar situations can help, but there's no 'right' way to feel. Respect your partner's way of coping and keep communication open.

Looking After Yourself

Eat well, stay active, and rest when you can. Limit caffeine, alcohol, and other substances. Surround yourself with supportive people and try to avoid unnecessary stress. It's okay to let some things go while you focus on your baby. Take breaks from the NICU to do something just for you, whether it's a walk, breathing exercises, or listening to music even while by your baby's side.



Perinatal mental health support is available

Being there for your baby and yourself: during the early days

Being with your baby

Celebrate every success big or small- yours and your baby's. Even in the NICU, your baby will reach milestones and make progress.

Get involved in your baby's care to strengthen your bond and support their wellbeing. Focus on one thing at a time, whether it's learning about equipment, recognizing stress signs, or gentle nappy changes.

Remember, your presence matters. Your touch, smell, and voice are unique and important to your baby. You are their strongest advocate.

Those first days and months with a premature baby can be filled with joy, relief and hope — but also worry, uncertainty and emotional strain.

ForWhen

Guiding new and expecting
parents to mental health care

ForWhen is here to support you through this unique chapter of parenthood.

ForWhen provides support through:

- A **free, national care-navigation phone line** (1300 24 23 22) staffed by trained clinical navigators.
- **Guidance** specifically for parents whose baby has arrived pre-term, including connecting you with local specialist supports for service, mental health and wellbeing.
- A **judgement-free space** where you can talk about your feelings, your baby's health journey, your anxieties about parenting and your mental wellbeing.
- **Support for accessing services and pathways** that are right for you, your baby and your family

Resources

If you or someone you love shows signs of post-natal depression, seek urgent medical help and visit [PMHweek.org.au](https://pmhweek.org.au) for guidance on support options.