

Babies with
special needs

Some babies are born with a condition that will make their life different in some ways, at least for a time. They have been born prematurely, or they may have an illness or condition that affects the way their body or brain works. These babies need special care in hospital. Their care will be supervised by a paediatrician. If your hospital doesn't have the facilities to care for your baby, he or she may go to a different hospital. NSW Health has a Newborn and paediatric Emergency Transport Service (NETS), which will arrange this by road or by air. It's often possible for you or your partner to travel with your baby to the new hospital.

Some parents know in advance that their baby will have a problem, but whether the news comes before or after the birth, you may have feelings that are hard to cope with. Grief, anger and disbelief are natural at this time. Many parents, especially mothers, are worried that they are somehow to blame for the problem – but this is very unlikely.

Babies with health problems usually need to stay in hospital for special attention after their mother has gone home, but it's very important for you and your baby to get to know each other. You'll be encouraged to do this as soon as possible after the birth, even if the baby is in a humidicrib.

You may hesitate to touch and handle your baby at first. The hospital staff understand your feelings and will try to help you cope with them.

You need as much support and information as you can get. Talking to your midwife, doctor, hospital staff, social worker or counsellor may help. So will talking to parents of babies with the same condition. Ask your midwife, doctor, hospital or Community Health Centre to put you in touch with appropriate community organisations or support groups. These organisations can provide information and support for you and your family.

When your baby is well enough to go home make sure you contact the Early Childhood Health Service near you or ask your hospital about making this contact for you. Early Childhood Health Services can support you, your family and your baby. They can advise on infant care, health and development concerns you may have. They provide regular health checks so that any concerns are addressed early. It is also good to make an appointment with your GP to let them know about your baby's health and ongoing medical needs.

If your baby has a problem, you'll have a lot of questions. Don't hesitate to ask them. It's a good idea to write your questions down to make sure they all get answered.