



Reading to your baby in the neonatal unit

Having a baby in a neonatal unit is a stressful and emotional time that can make you feel overwhelmed. The time you spend at your baby's cot really does have a big impact on your baby's experience now and in their long-term development.

Talking, reading and singing to your baby may not seem as important as the medical care, but it is, and it is something you will do best.

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How does it help your baby?

- By 24 weeks of pregnancy your baby's hearing has developed enough to hear sounds. They have been listening to the sound of your voice and will recognise it. Hearing you will comfort and reassure them.
- Your voice lets them know that you are there, and can help you feel close to them.
- It can boost their brain and language development. Research shows that reading and talking to babies makes a big difference and can help their future development.
- It can help you too. Reading stories or singing lullabies gives you a distraction from watching the monitors and alarms and may help you feel calmer.
- It's a lovely way to have meaningful moments together.



Nervous? Here are a few tips:

- Don't worry about other people listening – and you will not be disturbing anyone.
- Babies like repetition. They will love hearing the same story over and over again. Use the books in the gift pack from the hospital and your Bookbug Baby Bag, or bring in stories from home.
- Watch for your baby's cues! Little signs like looking away, yawning, putting their hands up and restlessness can mean your baby is getting tired. You'll know best when they need a break – just pause, and save the story for later.
- Get brothers and sisters reading, talking or singing. This gives them an important job to do during a visit and it helps them to bond with baby too.
- Make up stories from picture books or try longer stories – pick something you'll enjoy too. The type of story doesn't matter – it's your voice your baby is interested in.
- Keep it up when you get home. Reading some of the same stories can help settle your baby when you make the move from the unit to home. It's also still a special moment to settle down and enjoy being together.

‘Our daughter Lucy was born at 24 weeks. A day or two after she was born, we were given a Bookbug Bag with several different stories in it. These stories have been a wonderful gift not only for Lucy but for our older daughter, Millie, who is 5. Not being able to hold her baby sister has been hard for Millie and these books allow her to make a connection with her sister in a different and really wonderful way, and bridges the gap until she is actually able to hold and cuddle her.’

– Parent



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