



Respiratory distress syndrome (RDS) (*RES-per-uh-tawr-ee di-STRES SIN-droh-m*) – A lung condition that is caused by lack of surfactant (which is a fluid produced in the lungs) and that makes it difficult for a baby to breathe

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) (*RESS-per-uh-tawr-ee sin-SYSH-ulVAHY-ruhs*) – A virus that can cause a serious respiratory infection, such as bronchiolitis or pneumonia, in babies born early. Premature babies are at high risk for severe RSV disease because their lungs are underdeveloped.

Retina (*RET-n-uh*) – The lining at the back of the eye that sends messages to the visual area of the brain

Retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) (*ret-n-OP-uh-thee of pree-muh-CHOOOR-i-tee*) – A condition of the eye in which blood vessels grow abnormally in the retina and can lead to vision loss or blindness

Sepsis (*SEP-sis*) – Infection of the blood

Spina bifida (*SPAHY-nuh BIF-i-duh*) – A birth defect affecting the spinal cord that can result in paralysis, as well as bladder and/or bowel problems

Step-down nursery (*step down NUR-suh-ree*) – Specialized care for babies who have graduated from the NICU, but still need more medical attention than that received in a regular newborn nursery

Surfactant (*sur-FAK-tent*) – A substance that is naturally produced by the lungs to prevent the small air sacs from collapsing. Artificial surfactant is used both to prevent and to treat respiratory distress syndrome by placing it into a baby's lungs through an endotracheal tube.

Tachycardia (*tak-i-KAHR-dee-uh*) – Fast heart rate

Ultrasound (*UHL-truh-sound*) – A painless test that uses sound waves to show pictures of tissues in the body

Umbilical catheter (*uhm-BIL-i-kuhl KATH-i-ter*) – A thin tube that is inserted into an artery or vein in the belly-button, through which fluids and medicines can be given

Vein (*veyn*) – A blood vessel that carries blood toward the heart

Ventilator (*VEN-tl-ey-ter*) (also called a respirator) – A machine that helps with breathing

Ventricular septal defect (VSD) (*ven-TRIK-ye-ler SEP-tl DEE-fekt*) – A hole between the two lower chambers of the heart



This information is for educational purposes only and is not intended to substitute for professional medical advice. Always consult with a healthcare professional if you have any questions about the health of your child.

GLOSSARY

Understanding

THE LANGUAGE OF PREMATURITY

From the moment that your baby arrived early, you have probably felt a little bit like people around you were speaking a foreign language. So many unfamiliar medical terms and abbreviations! What do they all mean? And what do they have to do with your baby's condition?

After all of the learning you did about being pregnant and preparing for delivery, it may seem overwhelming now to have to learn about the whole world of prematurity. But you already have some of this knowledge — especially about what all babies need to stay healthy — which will help you when you are faced with the unfamiliarity of the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) and the reality of taking home a baby who is born early.

Following is a glossary of some of the terms you may hear or read while your baby is in the NICU or even after you bring your baby home. While you can use this as a guideline, you should always feel comfortable asking your baby's healthcare provider any questions that you may have. Since there is so much information to take in, you cannot be expected to remember it all. It may help you to write down your questions and the answers that your healthcare provider gives you. The more you know about your baby's condition, the better you will be able to care for this tiny new life, in the NICU and at home.



GLOSSARY OF WORDS AND TERMS:

Apnea (*AP-nee-uh*) – A pause in breathing that lasts for 15 seconds or more

Artery (*AHR-tuh-ree*) – A blood vessel that carries blood away from the heart

Asphyxia (*as-FIK-see-uh*) – Not enough oxygen

Atrial septal defect (ASD) (*EY-tree-el SEP-tl DEE-fekt*) – A hole between the two upper chambers of the heart

Auditory brainstem response (ABR) test (*AW-di-tawr-ee BREYN-stem ri-SPONS test*) – A painless test that examines hearing (also see 'Brainstem auditory evoked response test')

Bili lights (*BIL-i lahys*) – Blue lights that are used to treat jaundice (soft eye shields are placed to protect the eyes) (also see 'Phototherapy')

Bilirubin (*BIL-i-roo-bin*) – A yellowish waste product that is made when red blood cells break down



Birth defect (*burth DEE-fekt*) – An abnormality in the physical structure of the body, or how the body works, that is present at birth. It can possibly result in a physical or mental disability, or in rare cases, may be fatal (cause death).

Blood gases (*bluhd gas-es*) – Levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood

Bradycardia (*brad-i-KAHR-dee-uh*) – A slow heart rate

Brainstem auditory evoked response test (*BREYN-stem AW-di-tawr-ee i-VOHKT ri-SPONS test*) – A painless test that examines hearing (also see ‘Auditory brainstem response test’)

Bronchopulmonary dysplasia (BPD) (*BRONG-koh-PUHL-muh-ner-ee dis-PLEY-zhuh*) – also called **chronic lung disease (CLD)** (*KRON-ik Luhng Di-ZEEZ*) – Lung damage that can occur in babies who were treated with oxygen and mechanical ventilation for a long time. This damage can make it difficult for a baby to breathe.

Cardiopulmonary monitor (*karh-dee-oh-PUHL-muh-ner-ee mon-i-ter*) – A machine that tracks heart and breathing rates

Catheter (*KATH-i-ter*) – A small, thin and flexible plastic tube through which fluids and medicines can be given

Central line (*SEN-truhl lahyn*) – A plastic tube that is inserted in a large blood vessel through which medication, fluid, or feedings can be given. It can also be used to draw blood and helps avoid the need for many needle sticks for a baby.

Cerebral palsy (*suh-REE-bruhl PAWL-zee*) – A condition that permanently affects body movement and muscle coordination

Chronological age (*kron-o-LOJ-i-kuhl eyj*) – Age of the baby calculated from the baby’s birth date



Corrected or Adjusted age (*kuh-REK-ted or uh-JUHS-tid eyj*) – Age of the baby calculated from the baby’s due date

Computed tomography scan (CT or CAT scan) (*kuhm-PYOO-ted TOH-muh-gra-fee*) – A picture of the inside of the body that is produced using a thin beam of radiation and a computer

Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) (*kuhn-TIN-yoo-uhs POZ-i-tiv AIR-wey PRESH-er*) – A machine that blows air into the lungs through small tubes in the baby’s nose, or a tube placed in the windpipe, and helps the baby to breathe

Cryotherapy (*krahy-oh-THER-uh-pee*) – Treatment for severe cases of retinopathy of prematurity that involves freezing abnormal tissue

Cytomegalovirus (*sahy-toh-meg-uh-loh-VAHY-ruhs*) – A virus that can cause infection in pregnant women and can be passed on to the baby. It can result in serious illness and neurological abnormalities in the baby.

Desaturation (*dee-sa-chur-A-shun*) – A drop in the oxygen level in the blood

Echocardiogram (*ek-oh-KAHR-dee-uh-gram*) – A painless test that uses sound waves (an ultrasound) to examine the heart

Endotracheal tube (*en-doh-TREY-kee-uhl toob*) – A small plastic tube that is inserted into the baby’s nose or mouth and helps the baby to breathe when the tube is connected to a ventilator

Fundoplication (*fun-DOH-pleh-KAY-shun*) – A surgical procedure in which the upper part of the stomach is wrapped around the lower part of the esophagus (the tube that connects the mouth to the stomach) to help reduce reflux

Gastroesophageal reflux (GER) (*gas-troh-i-sof-uh-JEE-uhl REE-fluhks*) – When the contents of the stomach are forced up into the esophagus

Gavage feeding (*guh-VAHZH FEE-ding*) – Feeding through a flexible tube that goes through the nose or mouth into the stomach

Gestational age (*je-STEY-shuh-nal eyj*) – Age of the baby, in weeks, calculated from the first day of the mother’s last menstrual period

Group B streptococcus (*groop B strep-tuh-KOK-uhs*) – A bacterial infection that a baby can get while passing through the birth canal; this may be avoided if a mother takes antibiotics before giving birth

Heart failure (*hahrt FEYL-er*) – When the heart cannot pump enough blood to the body’s other organs

Hyperglycemia (*hahy-per-glahy-SEE-mee-uh*) – High blood sugar

Hypoglycemia (*hahy-poh-glahy-SEE-mee-uh*) – Low blood sugar

Incubator (*IN-kyuh-bey-ter*) or **isolette** (*ahy-suh-LET*) – A clear, plastic-enclosed crib, in which babies are placed to keep them warm and to decrease the chance of infection

Intrauterine growth restriction (IUGR) (*in-truh-YOO-ter-in groth ree-STRIKT-shuhn*) – A term used to describe babies who are smaller than they should be for their gestational age

Intravenous (*in-truh-VEE-nuhs*) – Within a vein

Intraventricular hemorrhage (IVH) (*in-truh-ven-TRIK-yuh-ler HEM-er-ij*) – Bleeding in the brain that can lead to brain damage

Jaundice (*JAWN-dis*) – Yellowing of the skin caused by a build-up in the blood of a waste product called bilirubin

Kangaroo care (*kang-guh-ROO kair*) – A method of holding a baby that involves skin-to-skin contact; the baby, who is naked except for a diaper, is placed in an upright position against the parent’s bare chest

Late-preterm infant (*leyt PREE-turm IN-fuhnt*) – A baby born between 34 and 36 completed weeks of pregnancy

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) (*mag-NET-ik REZ-uh-nuhns IM-uh-jing*) – A picture of the soft tissues in the body that is produced using a magnet and a computer

Mechanical ventilation (*muh-KAN-i-kuhl ven-tl-EY-shuhn*) – Use of a machine, called a ventilator or respirator, to help a baby breathe

Nasal cannula (*NEY-zuhl KAN-yuh-luh*) – Soft plastic tubing with prongs that is placed in the baby’s nose and delivers oxygen

Necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) (*NEK-ruh-tahy-zing en-tuh-roh-koh-LAHY-tis*) – An infection of the intestines; if severe, it can cause air and bacteria to leak into the abdomen

Neonatologist (*nee-oh-ney-TOL-uh-jist*) – A pediatrician with specialized, advanced training in the care of sick or preterm newborn babies

Neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) (*nee-oh-NEYT-l in-TEN-siv kair YOO-nit*) – A section in a hospital that provides 24-hour care for sick and premature babies



using specialized equipment and highly trained medical personnel

Nitric oxide (*NAHY-trik OK-sahyd*) – A gas that can help expand blood vessels; it is sometimes used to treat babies who have persistent pulmonary hypertension (see definition below)

Nosocomial infection (*nos-uh-KOH-mee-uhl in-FEK-shun*) – An infection that a baby can get while in the hospital

Otoacoustic emission test (OAE) (*oto-a-KU-stik i-MISH-uhn test*) – A painless hearing test

Oxygen hood (*OK-si-juhn hood*) – A clear plastic box that fits over the baby’s head and supplies oxygen

Patent ductus arteriosus (*PAT-nt duk-tus ar-te-ree-OH-sus*) – A heart defect that can occur when an open blood vessel in the heart does not close properly after birth

Periventricular leukomalacia (PVL) (*per-ee-ven-TRIK-yuh-ler loo-ko-may-LAY-sha*) – Injury of the white matter, which is the inner part of the brain. The condition can lead to cerebral palsy and other neurological problems.

Persistent pulmonary hypertension of the newborn (PPHN) (*per-SIS-tuhnt PUHL-muh-ner-ee hahy-per-TEN-shuhn of the noo-bawrn*) – This condition limits the amount of blood flow and oxygen delivered to the lungs, which leads to breathing difficulties

Phototherapy (*foh-tuh-THER-uh-pee*) – Blue lights that are used to treat jaundice (soft eye shields are placed to protect the eyes) (also see ‘Bili lights’)

Pneumothorax (*noo-muh-THAWR-aks*) – A condition in which air leaks out from the lung into the space between the lung and chest wall and causes the lung to collapse

Premature baby (*pree-muh-CHOR BEY-bee*) – A baby born at less than 37 weeks of pregnancy

Pulse oximeter (*puhls ok-SIM-i-ter*) – A small machine that painlessly measures blood oxygen levels

Radiant warmer (*REY-dee-uhnt WAWR-mer*) – An open bed with overhead heating to keep the baby warm

Reactive airway disease (RAD) (*ree-AK-tiv AIR-wey di-ZEEZ*) – A condition in which the airways in the lungs overreact to infection or an irritant, which causes them to become narrow, making it hard to breathe

