



## Coping With An Ill Or Premature Newborn

(NAPSA)—What if the hardest day of your life was also your first? This is true for the one of every 10 infants in the United States who are born too soon or very sick. In newborn intensive care units (NICUs) across the country, they struggle to survive—but they can and are being helped.

Instead of taking home a healthy newborn, parents spend hours in the hospital, talking to specialists. The medical equipment helping their baby can be frightening and the doctors and nurses use clinical words that parents don't understand. The busy, hectic atmosphere in the NICU is stressful. Often, the mother, feeling lonely and sad, leaves the hospital before the baby does.

Having their baby hospitalized in the NICU can be frightening, confusing and overwhelming for parents. When a baby is born prematurely, the family faces a world of unknowns.

That's where the March of Dimes can help. It provides an online community where families can connect with others who understand the challenges and uncertainties of the NICU experience. March of Dimes Share Your Story is at [www.marchofdimes.org/share](http://www.marchofdimes.org/share). As one mother put it: "Share Your Story is home to all of us who have not had that picture-perfect pregnancy, who struggle with little ones in the NICU or forever hold their child in their heart. It is where I found hope for the future."

There's also the March of Dimes NICU Family Support® Program. It helps families manage the NICU experience. The program provides information and comfort to families during a baby's stay in the hospital, during the transition home, and in the event of a newborn death.

Many premature babies face life-threatening complications so things can change very quickly. One day the baby appears to be doing well; the next, the baby is fighting to survive. Families with premature babies often refer to the NICU as a roller-coaster experience.

The NICU stay can last for months, and often the hospital is located miles from home. Day-to-



**Babies sometimes have to fight for their lives. But you can help to offer comfort and information to their families in this crisis.**

day life is completely disrupted. Parents spend hours in the NICU, away from their other children and their jobs, which may cause additional stress as they struggle to find balance between the needs of their family and the need to work.

Faced with making important decisions about their baby, families find that marriages and relationships are tested as never before. The baby's siblings may feel worried—and left out.

Fortunately, while the doctors and nurses are focused on their little patients, mothers and fathers can turn to the March of Dimes programs to find the support that addresses their needs, along with those of siblings, grandparents and the extended family.

In addition, there are things you can do to deal with the situation. It can help to establish a routine. Find a way to balance work, home life and visiting the hospital. You can get yourself to leave your baby's side when you can feel comfortable doing so. It's important to have time for yourself, with your partner and with your other children. Also take time to do things you enjoy, such as exercise. Restful breaks can help you find the strength to keep going.

### Learn More

For further facts, go to [www.marchofdimes.org/giving/support-share-your-story.aspx](http://www.marchofdimes.org/giving/support-share-your-story.aspx). To discover how you can donate time or money to help these families, see <http://share.marchofdimes.org>.