STAGE 5

Preparation for home

At this stage, many babies take most or all feeds by mouth, hold their temperature in an open cot and breathe steadily on their own. The focus often shifts to you: rooming-in, learning any equipment, and working through your unit's discharge checks. Your care team decides when it is time to go home together.

Hurdles to stage 6

What usually comes next. Tick them off as they happen.

- [ ] Rooming-in: you have cared for your baby through a practice period, usually overnight.
- [ ] Equipment training: you have been shown how to use any equipment your baby needs at home.

Discharge criteria

What units commonly check before a baby goes home. Your unit's list may differ.

- [ ] Feeding: taking all feeds by breast or bottle (unless your team has planned home tube feeding)
- [ ] Temperature: holding a steady temperature in an open cot
- [ ] Breathing: breathing steadily on their own — off monitors (wire-free)
- [ ] Caffeine stopped, with the apnoea-free observation window your unit requires (unless your team plans home caffeine)
- [ ] Car seat tolerance screen passed, if your unit does one (usually 90–120 minutes)
- [ ] Approval from your medical team for home care

Milestones at stage 5

- [ ] I have roomed-in with my baby and practised caring for them in a home-like environment.
- [ ] I have been trained to use any medical equipment my baby needs.
- [ ] My baby has had their first bath, and most feeds are now oral.
- [ ] My baby is off monitors (wire-free), needing only oxygen-saturation checks if required.
- [ ] Follow-up appointments and community supports are arranged.
- [ ] Our care team has told us my baby has met their discharge criteria, and I feel prepared to care for them at home.

General information and personal tracking only, not medical advice. This guide brings together publicly available guidance from health organisations and published research. It has not been reviewed by a clinician and is not tailored to your baby. Your care team knows your baby best. In an emergency, call emergency services immediately.

A note for you

Progress is not always a straight line. Many babies move back a stage for a while — that is a common part of NICU time, not a step backwards for you.

Your reflections

Something I learned this week:

Support I would like right now:

One small thing I did for myself:

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