STAGE 4

Advanced growth & feeding

Many babies at this stage are learning to feed by mouth — coordinating sucking, swallowing and breathing, which usually matures somewhere around 34 to 36 weeks corrected age. They are keeping warm in an open cot and needing little or no breathing support. The next goal is taking more feeds by breast or bottle while continuing to grow.

Hurdles to stage 5

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

- [ ] Feeding independence: most feeds are taken orally, by breast or bottle, with limited tube support.
- [ ] Steady growth: your baby is gaining weight consistently along their own growth curve.
- [ ] Breathing: your baby is breathing without respiratory support.
- [ ] Temperature: your baby holds their own temperature in an open cot.

Milestones at stage 4

- [ ] My baby is developing oral motor skills and showing readiness for breastfeeding or bottle feeding.
- [ ] My baby and I have experienced their first breastfeed or bottle feed.
- [ ] My baby has moved from the humidicrib into an open cot.
- [ ] My baby is beginning to wear clothes for the first time.
- [ ] My baby is taking more of their feeds by mouth, with less tube support.
- [ ] I am learning how to support my baby with feeding, including pacing, positioning and reflux.

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:

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.

Support I would like right now:

One small thing I did for myself:

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