

# Prematurity Pathway





# What is the 'Prematurity Pathway'?

This is the pathway a baby will follow if they are referred because they were born prematurely and/or with a low birth weight. NB, babies who are born prematurely/moderately prematurely may not require an immediate referral unless they have an extremely low birth weight and/or there are other concerns raised.

## Key Definitions:

Premature – <37 weeks  
Moderately Premature – 35-37 weeks  
Very Premature – 29-34 weeks  
Extremely Premature – 24-28 weeks  
Low Birth Weight - <2500g (5.5lbs)  
Very Low Birth Weight - <1500g (3.0lbs)  
Extremely Low Birth Weight - <1000g (2.0lbs)



# Who Can Refer?

Your baby can be referred by a Doctor, Health Visitor or any other healthcare professional involved in their care. The referral will be received by our physiotherapy team who will organise an initial assessment as soon as possible after receiving the referral.



# What Happens Next?

We will review your baby at roughly 4, 7, 10, 13 and 16 months (or typically until your baby is walking).

We can give recommendations and activities to work on to help your baby meet their developmental milestones.

If your baby needs a bit more support, we can see them more frequently and may offer a therapy block.

**What activities can I  
practice to help  
support my premature  
baby's physical  
development?**

# Nesting and Using 2 Hands Together

Learning to use my 2 hands together in the middle is a really important stage of development for future skills (grasping, releasing, hand eye co-ordination, body awareness, problem solving etc)

Even if I can reach up with one hand when flat on the floor a nested position will help me to bring my hands together

- Try a hand and foot massage to help me become aware of my hands and feet.
- Try gentle clapping games with me and help me explore your face with my hands.



# Reaching up for toys lying on my back

Lying on my back can be hard work as I need to lift up my arms and legs against gravity. You can make it easier for me by making a nest with cushions or towels.

The aim is to curl me up so that my legs and arms come forward. This will help me to use my tummy muscles to steady myself for reaching and exploring

Encourage me to reach up for and swipe at toys. First of all you might need to help me do this hand over hand



# Using My Mouth to explore

I put things in my mouth to learn about them

Exploring my toys, hands and feet with my mouth will help my body awareness and helps me to learn about textures, materials and temperature etc

It can be hard to get things to my mouth lying flat on my back a nested position can help

The aim is to curl me up so that my legs and arms come forward. This will help me to use my tummy muscles to steady myself for manipulating and exploring.

You might need to help me to bring the toy to my mouth to begin with.





# Side Lying

*Practicing side lying will :*

- *help me to learn to rotate or turn my body*
- *Support the development of my confidence in movement.*

- Start with me laying on my back.
- With lots of support help me to roll over on to my side, help me to stay here until I relax and can maintain it on my own.
- Having a toy and you talking to me when I'm on my side can help to calm me.
- Start very slowly and calmly,
- As I gain confidence help me to increase the speed and develop my independence with rolling.
- Repeat on the other side.



Encourage rotation and reaching across my body by placing a toy on the side I am going to roll to, hand over hand will help to show me what to do.

# Rolling Side to Side

*It's never too early or late to start me to getting used to movement from side to side! This activity will:*

- Help me to get used to the movement of fluid in my ears as I move.*
- Help me to learn that I have 2 sides to my body.*
- Help me to activate my tummy and neck muscles*
- Help me prepare for rolling*
- Helps me develop the side to side movements of my tongue which will help with feeding and later speech.*

Help me to hold my feet and hands together in the middle.

Slowly move me from side to side, giving me time to turn my head myself.



# Tummy Time

Tummy time helps me to strengthen the muscles in my neck, trunk and shoulders  
I need to go on my tummy for a few minutes, lots of times through the day:

- Try putting me on my tummy over your lap or on your chest .
- If my head and shoulders are higher than my bottom it will be easier for me to lift my head and push up.

I may be unhappy when first trying this but keep trying and don't give up and I will get used to it in the end!



# Movement and Flying

*Give me a lot of support so I feel safe. Start off with small movements and gradually build as I gain in confidence.*

*Include movements in all directions as this will help my understanding of movement to develop. Make sure you support my head as I can't fully do this on my own yet 😊*

- Fully support me flying through the air...
  - On my back
  - On my tummy
  - Rolling
  - Flying up to the ceiling
  - Scooping back down.
  - Rotating forward
  - Rotating backwards like on a swing.



If any activities or recommendations within this programme cause undue pain or discomfort please **stop** and contact our team immediately.

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