

# PUTTING INTO PRACTICE THE HOSPITALIZED NEWBORN CHARTER

Tool for parents

 **sosPréma**  
& bébés hospitalisés



## THE HOSPITALIZED NEWBORN CHARTER

This Charter was created by SOS Préma, with the support of doctors and the Ministry of Health. It is part of the national program 'The First 1000 Days of a Child'. **It is a joint commitment between parents and healthcare professionals with the aim of providing the best possible care to hospitalized babies.**

## SOS PRÉMA CARDS

These cards were designed to support you during your baby's hospital stay. They explain the Charter in simple words and give you practical ideas to help your baby.

For each point of the Charter, you will find:

- why you are important for your baby,
- and how to move forward, step by step.

Each neonatal unit has its own rules, which may vary slightly. Speak with your baby's care team to find out what is possible and to ask any questions you may have.



*See the full Hospitalized Newborn Charter in English* 



## POINT 1 : THE PRESENCE OF PARENTS

### Why am I so important for my baby?

Your baby already knows you – your smell, your voice, and the rhythm of your heartbeat. When you are close to your baby, they feel these familiar sensations again and feel comforted. Very quickly, you will be the person who knows your baby best. You will understand what helps your baby feel comfortable, which will also support the medical team in providing the best care.

### Step by step

- Complete the administrative procedures to benefit from your parental leave.
- Learn about the benefits of being present with your baby as much as possible.
- Indicate whether you wish to stay at the hospital during the day and night so that you can sleep, eat, wash or receive a few visitors.
- Adjust your daily routine to spend as much time as possible with your baby.
- Ask for help from family or friends if needed.



## POINT 1 : THE PRESENCE OF PARENTS

TO GO  
FURTHER

### What is a 'resource person'?

A resource person is someone you trust – a family member or a friend, chosen by you and the other parent. Depending on the hospital rules, you may choose one or two.

If neither parent can be present, the resource person can look after your baby. He or she can care for your baby while you are away, just as you would expect someone you trust to care for your child at home. Together with the care team, you can decide what this person is allowed to do, such as feeding your baby, changing a nappy or even doing skin-to-skin contact.

**The resource person can also support you emotionally during this difficult time. Be sure to introduce this person to the care team at the beginning of the hospital stay.**

*To learn more, see page 54 in the Guide*



## POINT 2 : THE PARENT-BABY BOND

### Why am I so important for my baby?

From birth, your baby depends on you to grow and develop. Little by little, a bond of trust gradually develops. Your baby shows their needs through their behavior. This can be challenging to understand, particularly during the first few days in hospital. However, with time, you will learn to understand your baby and discover the best ways to support their development.

### Step by step

- ❑ Observe your baby with a caregiver to notice signs of attachment.
- ❑ Notice when your baby is ready to interact (through eye contact, movements, or sounds).
- ❑ Once your baby is ready to interact, you can talk to them, sing, practice skin-to-skin contact, gently touch them or make eye contact.
- ❑ Participate in comforting care with a professional, and adjust to your baby's reactions.
- ❑ Learn to recognize your baby's signals and to respond to their needs.



## POINT 2: THE PARENT-BABY BOND

TO GO  
FURTHER

### How to respond to your baby's signals

Your baby spreads their fingers and tries to grab something?	Offer your finger. You may feel their tiny hand close around it – a special moment!
Your baby opens their eyes?	Show your face, smile, make gentle sounds or playful expressions.
Your baby makes small mouth movements?	Offer your breast or some milk to suck, or delay any non-urgent care for a moment.
Your baby frowns?	Lower the lights or close the blinds.
Your baby startles or pauses breathing briefly when someone speaks loudly?	Speak softly and ask others to do the same. Close the door if possible.
Your baby grimaces, twists, or stretches their arms and legs?	Help them curl up gently – this helps them feel secure and comfortable.

*To learn more, see pages 40-41 in the Guide*



## POINT 3 : SKIN-TO-SKIN CONTACT

### Why am I so important for my baby?

Skin-to-skin contact is very special for your baby. During this time, your baby feels sensations that remind them of being in their mother's womb. The more time your baby spends in skin-to-skin contact, the more it supports their growth. It is also a precious and loving moment for you as a parent.

### Step by step

- ❑ Learn about the benefits of skin-to-skin contact – for your baby (better breathing, digestion, sleep, temperature regulation, and brain development) and for you (better rest and stronger emotional bond).
- ❑ Learn how to place your baby safely in skin-to-skin on your chest, with the help of a caregiver at first.
- ❑ Get comfortable: have something to drink or to eat nearby, and make sure you can easily call the team if you need help.
- ❑ Observe your baby's reactions during skin-to-skin contact to understand what they enjoy and need.



## POINT 3 : SKIN-TO-SKIN CONTACT

TO GO  
FURTHER

### What if you don't enjoy skin-to-skin?

People often say that skin-to-skin contact is 'wonderful.' That's true – it offers many benefits to both your baby and you. But **it's also normal to not always feel comfortable, especially at the beginning.** You might feel shy, nervous, or worried about hurting your baby. **You are not alone. Talk about your feelings** with the care team, other parents, or with the SOS Préma helpline. Together, we can find ways to make the next session more comfortable for you.

**And if you still don't enjoy it, that's okay.** Eventually, the other parent or your chosen resource person can do it instead. You can also share other special moments with your baby - talking, looking at each other or gentle touch.

**There are many ways to show love to your baby.**

SOS Préma Family Helpline (in French)

0800 96 60 60

Service & appel  
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*Marie and Mathieu share their  
first skin-to-skin experience.*





## POINT 4: GIVING COLOSTRUM (THE FIRST MILK)

### Why am I so important for my baby?

Your breast milk is unique for your baby and has many benefits – some doctors even compare it to medicine! Right after birth, mothers produce a first milk called colostrum. It is thick and yellow-orange, and very rich in protection against infections. The taste of this first milk reminds your baby of the womb. In the first hours, it's normal to collect only a few drops: your baby needs very small amounts at first.

### Step by step

- Learn about the benefits of colostrum and breast milk - for your baby, and for you.
- Remember you always have a choice. You can give colostrum or milk, or not. You can stop or continue whenever you wish.
- Ask what milk your baby will receive if it is not your own.
- Learn how to hand-express colostrum or use a breast pump, with support from the care team.
- Check that your baby is receiving your colostrum or milk as planned.



## POINT 4: GIVING COLOSTRUM (THE FIRST MILK)

### Does giving colostrum mean I have to breastfeed for a long time?

Shortly after birth (sometimes even before), you may be asked if you want to give your milk to your baby. You may need to answer quickly because the first milk expression works best within the first few hours after birth.

**But saying 'yes' does not mean you are committing for months!** You can give your milk for a few days, a few weeks, or as long as you want— and you can stop at any time. **It is entirely your choice.**

**Even a few drops help your baby:  
every milliliter counts!**

*How to express your first milk  
by hand.*





## POINT 5 : THE POSSIBILITY OF BREASTFEEDING OR BOTTLEFEEDING

### Why am I so important for my baby?

Even if your baby is not feeding well yet, they start practicing very early. In the womb, your baby may have sucked their fingers or the umbilical cord. During skin-to-skin contact, your baby may show signs that they want to suck. If you gently help your baby find the breast at that moment, you support their learning – it is a small but important step toward feeding on their own.

### Step by step

- Learn about the benefits of skin-to-skin contact for helping your baby learn to feed.
- Observe your baby with a caregiver to notice signs that they want to suck.
- Know how to respond when your baby shows they are ready to feed.
- Do skin-to-skin before, during, and after meals – even if your baby is fed through a tube.
- Learn how to feed your baby through a tube (or by hand or with a small cup), with support from the care team.
- Understand the different steps your baby goes through while learning to feed.



## POINT 5: THE POSSIBILITY OF BREASTFEEDING OR BOTTLEFEEDING

TO GO  
FURTHER

### Feeding time: a moment of pleasure!

Your baby is learning. Step by step, they are discovering how to feed on their own. This can take time and may sometimes feel challenging. **There is no need to rush or force anything.**

Feeding should be a pleasant moment you share together. What matters most is the bond you create with your baby, not the amount of milk they drink. The care team will make sure your baby gets enough nutrition (for example, through tube feeding if needed).

**Let your baby go at their own pace:  
that's the rhythm that suits them best!**

*To learn more, see pages 33-34 in the Guide*



## POINT 6: A COMFORTABLE ENVIRONMENT

### Why am I so important for my baby?

When you are close to your baby, you help create a calm and comfortable environment – through your voice, gentle light, familiar smells, touch, and taste. You can support your baby by noticing what helps them feel good and what causes discomfort. This helps your baby relax and feel ready to connect with you.

### Step by step

- Observe your baby with a caregiver to understand what kind of environment suits them best.
- Learn about your baby's sensory needs.
- Recognize when your baby is asleep or awake.
- Learn how to protect your baby's sleep and support their awake times.
- Notice when your baby wants contact and when they need a break.
- Adjust the environment (light, noise, touch...) based on your baby's reactions.



## POINT 6: A COMFORTABLE ENVIRONMENT

TO GO  
FURTHER

### Understanding your baby's behavior

Your baby sends you signals to show how they feel:

- When your baby feels comfortable and wants contact, these are called 'approach signals.'
- When your baby feels uncomfortable or needs calm, these are called 'withdrawal signals.'

You can look at the Charter in the Guide to help you recognize these behaviors. Talk with the care team about what your observations. Since you spend the most time with your baby, you are the ones who best understand their signals. You are the experts in your baby's behavior!

**Your baby communicates through their body and movements.  
By learning to understand their language, you can help them  
feel safe and supported.**

*To learn more, see pages 38-39 in the Guide*



## POINT 7 : PARENTS' PARTICIPATION IN CARE

### Why am I so important for my baby?

In the hospital, it is not always easy to learn how to care your baby. You have to become parents in a world that is not the one you had imagined. The health care team will provide part of the care because your baby needs special attention, but they also need you to comfort, reassure, and help your baby feel safe. You will learn to do some of the care yourself, as you will continue later at home: feeding, bathing or giving medicine to your baby. All of this is important for your baby's well-being, and only you can provide it with your love and presence.

### Step by step

- Learn how your baby's care is organized, and try to be available whenever possible.
- Observe the care being done and talk with caregivers to understand what you can do when you feel ready.
- Support your baby during care, following both the team's advice and your baby's behavior.
- Do the care together with a caregiver, then gradually on your own, always adapting to your baby's behavior.



## POINT 7: PARENTS' PARTICIPATION IN CARE

TO GO  
FURTHER

### You are not born a parent, you become one!

Caring for a baby in the hospital can be scary at first. But you are not alone, the team is there to support you.

At first, you watch the caregivers do things. Then, step by step, you learn to do these tasks yourself. These moments are very important for your baby and help them feel calm and safe.

With time, you will gain confidence and you will soon be able to care for your baby on your own.

**Your participation is precious and should happen at your own pace.  
Nothing happens all at once: your confidence and skills  
grow slowly but surely.**

*To learn more, see pages 42-44 in the Guide*



## POINT 8: PARENTS' PROTECTIVE ROLE

### Why am I so important for my baby?

In neonatal care, some procedures may be unpleasant or even painful for your baby. The care team always tries to make your baby as comfortable as possible, often without using medication. There are also gentle ways you can help comforting your baby, such as skin-to-skin contact, breastfeeding, or letting them suck a few drops of milk. These are all comforting and powerful gestures that only you can offer them!

### Step by step

- ❑ Learn to recognize when your baby feels pain or discomfort, and know what strategy I can use to help soothe them.
- ❑ Tell the care team whether you want to be present during a difficult procedure.
- ❑ Comfort your baby during care, following the team's advice and observing your baby's reactions.
- ❑ Alert the care team if you notice that your baby seems uncomfortable or in pain.
- ❑ Discuss with the caregivers which methods work best to soothe your baby when they seem uncomfortable.



## POINT 8: PARENTS' PROTECTIVE ROLE

TO GO  
FURTHER

### Is skin-to-skin the best natural pain relief?

Scientific studies show that skin-to-skin contact helps babies calm down during painful moments. It can comfort them when it is performed before, during, and after a painful procedure. And it is as effective as – or even better – than giving a small amount of sugar (sucrose) to reduce pain.

**Skin-to-skin contact also helps prevent stress and agitation during blood tests or other procedures.**

*To learn more,  
see page 46 in the Guide*

*Skin-to-skin contact, the best shield  
to protect the vulnerable baby*





## POINT 9: ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION

### Why am I so important for my baby?

As parents, you are your baby's legal representatives. This means you have the right to know your baby's health condition, and understand what the medical team is doing to care for them. This information helps you **take part in your baby's care plan, ask questions, and share your opinions**. You are an essential part of your baby's care team.

### Step by step

- ❑ Meet with a doctor in the first days of hospitalization, and then regularly afterward.
- ❑ Ask the team to use simple words if medical terms are difficult to understand.
- ❑ At each meeting, rephrase what you have been told in your own words to make sure you have understood the information given.
- ❑ Share your questions and your opinions without hesitation, the team is there to listen and to take into account your suggestions.



## POINT 9: ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION

TO GO  
FURTHER

### What does 'informed opinion' mean?

Before giving your opinion about a care decision, you should receive all the important information you need to understand well the situation: the possible risks, the benefits, and what it means for your baby. Once everything is clear for you, you can express your wishes and say what feels right for you and your baby.

SOS Préma volunteer parents can also help you.

**There are no wrong question, so always feel free to ask.**

*To learn more,  
see pages 100-101 in the Guide*

*Find your nearest local  
SOS Préma branch*





## POINT 10 : INDIVIDUALIZED CARE

### Why am I so important for my baby?

Every baby is different. Each one has their own strengths, sensitivities, and pace of development. That's why the care team adapts to your baby's needs throughout the hospital stay. A treatment that suited them yesterday may no longer be the best option next week.

As a parent, you play an important role in ensuring that your baby's care matches their unique needs.

### Step by step

- Learn to recognize your baby's 'approach' and 'withdrawal' signals.
- Stay informed about your baby's care plan.
- Observe your baby's behavior every day.
- Share with the team what you notice : how your baby looks, reacts, and feels.
- Take part in developing your baby's care plan together with the team.



## POINT 10: INDIVIDUALIZED CARE

TO GO  
FURTHER

### What is a 'shared care plan'?

A **care plan** is a document that explains how the medical team will care for your baby, day by day. It becomes a **shared care plan** when it is created together with you, taking into account your baby's needs, the unit's organization, and your own possibilities as parents.

By participating in this process, you can share what is important to you, ask your questions, and better understand the care given to your baby.

**A shared care plan helps everyone move forward together with the same goal: your baby's comfort and well-being.**

## You are the people who know your baby best.

Every gesture counts: a word, a look, a moment of skin-to-skin... Even in the hospital, where everything can feel overwhelming, your presence is precious. It helps your baby feel safe and grow well.

You can lean on the care team – ask questions and share what matters to you.

**You are already doing so much, even if you are not always aware of it.**

The SOS Préma Association is also there to support you. Thanks to our team, made up of parents of premature babies and healthcare professionals, we listen to you and answer your questions. Please feel free to contact us.

**SOS Préma Family Helpline**  
(in French)

**0800 96 60 60**

Service & appel  
gratuits



Did these cards help you during your baby's hospital stay?

Would you like to share your experience?

Scan this QR code to tell us!

Your feedback will help us improve this tool for other parents.

[www.sosprema.com](http://www.sosprema.com)

