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PARENTS

Finding your light

20 WAYS TO STAY STRONG ON YOUR
NICU JOURNEY



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The NICU wasn't in your birth plan, and between the constant beeping and worry, it's easy to lose your inner light. But even on the hardest days, there are small ways to nurture your spirit while caring for your little warrior. Whether you're newly arrived or settling in for a longer stay, these 20 sparkle-finders are your gentle reminders that you're stronger than you know, and that it's okay to take care of your heart while you're taking care of your baby. This is just one step in living the Premie Parents™ Principles of P.E.A.C.E.



The NICU journey wasn't in your plans, but you've got more strength than you know. Here are simple, proven ways to recharge while supporting your preemie:

Body Boosters

- Fuel up with protein-rich snacks and colorful fruits/veggies (skip the sugary stuff)
- Take 10-minute walks - even a quick loop around the NICU can energize you for hours
- Power nap when you can - even 20 minutes helps reset your brain
- Stay hydrated and limit caffeine to avoid the crash-and-burn cycle

Mind & Spirit:

- Practice belly breathing: Hand on stomach, breathe deep, feel it rise and fall
- Celebrate every tiny victory - each step forward matters
- Take 15 minutes daily for something that fills your spiritual cup (reading, music, meditation)
- Keep a gratitude journal or victory log
- Filter your environment - limit time with energy-draining people
- Use uplifting essential oils like citrus or peppermint to boost your mood



Connection & Support:

- Share updates your way - it's okay to set boundaries
- Help another NICU parent - even small kindnesses boost both spirits
- Accept help when offered - saving energy matters
- Join a NICU parent group - online or in-person
- Stay connected with your support system

Self-Care Priorities:

- Schedule regular breaks from the NICU - guilt-free
- Treat yourself to small comforts - you deserve them
- Get outside when possible - sunlight helps reset your rhythms
- Create a comfort box: Pack a small container with items that soothe or energize you (favorite tea, hand lotion, inspiring photos, comfy socks) to keep with you in the NICU.
- Try the 5-5-5 reset: When overwhelmed, take 5 slow breaths, list 5 things you can see, and stretch for 5 seconds - this quick grounding exercise can help restore focus and energy

Here are 20 proven ways to increase your energy – spiritually, mentally and physically.

1. Eat a balanced, low-glycemic (low sugar content) diet that consists of raw fruits and vegetables, nuts (like almonds, cashews), whole grains (not white bread) and fish (especially halibut). Most of all, remember to eat!
2. Get moving! Did you know that a brisk 10-minute walk will increase your energy and that energy will last for up to two hours? Walk around the NICU, the parking lot or even to the cafeteria to get some great food.
3. Take a power nap. Research has shown that pushing our brains too hard can sap your energy. The National Institute of Mental Health found that a 60-minute "power nap" can not only reverse the mind-numbing effects of information overload and stress.
4. Do whatever you can to reduce stress. We have a deeper dive on stress in: Check out our article: The Premie Parent's Pause Button: Finding Your Calm in the Storm.
5. Breathe deeply. Here's How to Do This In the NICU:
 1. Sit or stand upright with your head and back supported.
 2. Place your hand on your abdomen, just under your belly button.
 3. Inhale deeply through your nose while gently pushing out your belly. You should feel the hand on your belly moving outward.
 4. Exhale slowly using pursed lips while gently pushing inward and upward on your belly with your hand to help empty your lungs completely.
 5. Practice this breathing technique until you are comfortable doing it anywhere, at any time.
6. Get off the coffee! Although coffee gives you an initial pop of energy, can promote burnout. I know it's hard and it might be your only pleasure but gradually cut your daily coffee intake.
7. Take 20 minutes every day for yourself. Whether reading a book, listening to music, meditating or just sitting, these 20 minutes will get you farther than almost anything.
8. Remember "V" victories? Celebrate all the wins in the NICU! The simple act of clapping and cheering changes your state of mind.
9. Focus on the positive. Being a pessimist takes a lot of energy.
10. Go home and take a shower. It will wake up your brain and your body.
11. Give in to one of your cravings and indulge yourself.
12. Get a massage. That's a great energy booster!

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13. Use aromatherapy. We discuss essential oils in the Natural Healing area of this Resources section. Peppermint, ginger and citrus smells boost energy.
14. Listen to some music that is heart-pumping and makes you want to dance.
15. Avoid people who sap your energy.
16. Review all that you accomplished each day. The act of celebrating your own successes will give you massive energy.
17. Help someone or volunteer. Being of service to others gives an instant energy boost. On one of Trey's "bad" days, I went to the hospital cafeteria to get some hot chocolate. As my turn came at the cashier, she said "Will that be all?" "No, I'll take care of this lady's coffee too." The woman accepted graciously, and I felt much better, as I headed back to the NICU.
18. As difficult as it may be at times, you must get on a regular sleep schedule. When you do sleep, be sure that you're getting a great night's sleep, even if it's for just a few hours. Be sure to sleep in a fully darkened bedroom (turn your alarm clock away from you if the display gives off too much light and turn the TV off). Your bedroom should be moderately cool (you'll wake up if it's too hot or too cold and using white noise (a fan or quiet music) to help induce sleepiness.
19. Create a calming playlist for your NICU experience. Choose songs that:
 - Have a slow tempo (60-80 beats per minute), which helps lower heart rate
 - Feature instrumental versions of your favorite songs (lyrics can sometimes be distracting)
 - Include nature sounds like gentle rain or ocean waves
 - Use soft instruments like piano, acoustic guitar, or strings
20. Set up a simple "NICU buddy system". Pair up with another NICU parent or rotate between a few supportive friends/family members who can sit with you during longer stays. Having someone to talk with, share concerns, or just sit quietly beside you can help maintain your emotional energy and make the time feel less draining. Even short 30-minute visits can give you a mental boost when you're feeling fatigued.

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Remember: Taking care of yourself isn't selfish - it's essential for being there for your baby. Every parent's journey is different, so pick the strategies that work best for you and adjust as needed. If you found this helpful, join our community of Premie Parents for more insights, support and sharing. You can join us [here](#).

