Feedback from the Real World: Find a support network

Here are some specific tips to get through your NICU experience (and beyond) from seasoned parents of preemies:

- Become your child's advocate.
- Take breaks from the unit when you can.
- Rest when you can.
- Read to your child in a soft voice.
- Make relationships with other parents with children in the NICU.
- Learn the medications and orders written for your child.
- Trust the advice of your doctors, but don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Listen to advice from nurses. Nurses have lots of interaction with your baby and can be a huge asset during extensive stays in the hospital.
- Ask for help when you get home.
- Avoid public places during RSV season (October to April), especially the child's first season. (RSV is a respiratory virus that can cause serious breathing problems in former preterm babies.)
- Make sure to ask lots of questions and get well educated on your own.
- Be prepared to feel helpless and wonder if the staff is giving your baby the best care possible.
- Be with your baby as much as possible (both parents).
- Partners need to support each other. This is a critical time in your lives.
- Keep in mind how resilient babies are.
- Be clean, clean, clean–infections and the NICU don't mix.
- Be involved as much as possible – help the nurses with daily tasks.
- If your baby is born under two pounds, you can sign him up for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). This is a federal income support program. Go to ssa.gov/ssi/ for details.
- Keep your own medical records. You may need them for future reference.
- Keep an open dialogue with case managers and doctors and take notes to help you remember. The intensity of the situation makes it difficult to remember details of conversations.
- Don't ever give up.

Special thanks for these tips to Kelli Kelley, mom of two preemies and founder of the organization, A Hand to Hold.

Because preemies and multiple births often go together, we'll chat about twins, triplets, and more (oh my!) next.