

Glossary

The NICU comes with its own language. Many of these medical terms may feel familiar to NICU parents, but this list is also here for friends, family, or organizations who may not know the words used every day in the hospital. My hope is that these simple explanations make the NICU easier to understand and a little less overwhelming.

A **Apnea** – When a baby stops breathing for a short time (usually more than 20 seconds, or shorter if it causes low oxygen or a slow heart rate).

B **Brain bleed (Intraventricular Hemorrhage, IVH)** – Bleeding in or around the brain, more common in very small or premature babies.

Bradycardia (Brady) – When a baby's heart beats slower than normal, often seen with apnea spells.

Cesarean (C-section) – A surgical delivery of a baby through the mother's abdomen and uterus.

C **Code** – A hospital emergency when a medical team rushes in to help someone whose heart or breathing has stopped.

Congenital heart disease (CHD) – A difference in the heart's structure present at birth that can affect how the heart works.

CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) – A machine that gently pushes air into a baby's nose to help keep the lungs open and make breathing easier.

Developmental delay – When a child takes longer than expected to reach milestones like sitting, walking, or talking.

D **D.N.R. (Do Not Resuscitate)** – A medical order that means doctors will not attempt CPR or other lifesaving measures if the heart or breathing stops.

Down syndrome – A condition present at birth when a baby has an extra chromosome, which may affect growth, learning, and development.

F **Feeding tube** – A thin tube used to give a baby milk or medicine when they cannot take enough by mouth. It may go through the nose (NG tube), mouth (OG tube), or directly into the stomach (G-tube).

G **G-tube (Gastrostomy tube)** – A tube placed directly into the stomach through the skin to give long-term feeding support.

H **Hydrocephalus** - A buildup of fluid in the brain that can cause swelling and pressure.

Isolette - A clear, enclosed crib that helps regulate a baby's temperature and protects them from germs and noise.

I **IV (Intravenous)** - A small tube placed in a vein (often in the hand, foot, or arm) to give medicine, fluids, or nutrition directly into the blood.

Necrotizing Enterocolitis (NEC) - A serious problem in the intestines where tissue becomes very sick or damaged.

N **NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit)** - A special part of the hospital that cares for newborn babies who are very small, very sick, or born early and need extra help.

Palliative care - Specialized care that focuses on comfort, quality of life, and family support when a baby faces serious illness.

Phototherapy - A treatment for jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes) that uses special blue lights to help the baby's body clear extra bilirubin.

P **Prematurity** - Being born before 37 weeks of pregnancy.

Preemie - A common nickname for a premature baby.

Preterm - Another word for being born early, before 37 weeks.

Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) - An eye condition that can happen in premature babies when the blood vessels in the eye grow in unusual ways, which can affect vision.

R **Rounds** - The daily time when the NICU team meets at each baby's bedside to review progress and discuss the care plan.

T **Tracheostomy (Trach)** - A small opening made in the neck with a tube placed in the windpipe (trachea) to help a baby breathe.

V **Ventilator (Vent)** - A machine that helps a baby breathe by moving air in and out of the lungs.

✨ No glossary can cover everything but remember—it's always okay to ask questions. You don't have to know every word to offer comfort, presence, and support.