

Common Characteristics of Premature Infants

The following are common features of premature babies' behavior and appearance. **All of these characteristics will change** as your babies get bigger, their organs and nervous system mature, and they develop into full term babies.

Can you see any of these characteristics in your baby?

Check all that apply right now:

Appearance

- They are small and thin
- Their skin color may be blotchy
- Their muscles are weak and they may appear floppy
- They have many tubes and wires attached to them

Behavior

- They sleep a lot¹
- Their cries may be very weak or inaudible
- Their movements may be jerky, and they may stick out their arms and legs in a brisk and rigid manner, as if startled²

Interactions

- When awake, they may look groggy or 'out of it'
- The monitor may alarm for different reasons³
- They may not always respond to talking or stroking because they are generally less active, alert, and responsive

¹ Premature babies are sleeping the majority of the time until they are roughly 32 weeks Gestational Age. Being in a deep sleep state is optimal for growing and healing.

² They may also do things like hold their fingers out wide. They do these things if they are a bit overstimulated; this is because they are more sensitive to stimulation than full term babies.

³ At times this is because of changes in the baby, such as their breathing or heart rate speeding up or slowing down, or the amount of oxygen in their blood changing. At times the nurse may need to do something to help your baby. At other times the monitor may alarm because of minor changes in the baby or because of inaccurate readings. At these times the nurse won't need to do anything. Nurses can quickly assess whether or not they need to intervene by looking at the monitor (or hearing different beep tones). You can always ask your nurse if you have a question or concern.