

# What You Need to Know: For Parents with Infants Born at 22 Weeks

---

## Do babies born at 22 weeks survive?

From 2007–2014, national survival for infants born at 22 weeks in the United States were 5–6%. This means, that if 100 babies are born, only 5 or 6 will survive. Over the last 10–15 years, more extremely premature infants have survived due to special interventions, better medications, and improved provider care. In 2022, national survival rates among infants receiving all interventions (or active care) was 30% at 22 weeks and 56% at 23 weeks.

## What are the survival rates for infants born at 22 weeks at Unity Point Health-Meriter?

Here at Meriter, our survival rates for babies born at 23–25 weeks range from 68 – 95%. Even though national survival rates for infants at 22 weeks receiving active care is up to 30%, these survival rates can vary from hospital to hospital. Though we have skilled neonatologists specialized in the care of extremely preterm infants, here at UPH –Meriter, we have only recently started to offer life-saving support to babies born at 22 weeks. So, we are still developing our survival rates.

## What are my options?

If your baby is born at less than 24 weeks, you have a choice of life-saving medications and life support or end-of-life comfort care. Regardless of the path you choose, our team will support you and help you navigate these difficult decisions.

### *Comfort care*

Instead of active treatment, your baby will spend time with you and be kept as comfortable as possible. If you decide this is the best option for your family, our team will guide you in holding, making memories, and saying goodbye.

### *Active care*

Your baby will need a breathing tube and ventilator (breathing machine). Some babies may be too small for the smallest breathing tube. Some infants may need medications or CPR. Many babies who require CPR are unlikely to survive. We do not recommend chest compressions at this early age. If we can stabilize your baby's breathing and heart rate, we will bring them to see you before traveling to the NICU for intensive care. In some cases, despite our best efforts, we may need to focus on comfort care.

## How will my baby look?

Babies at 22 weeks weigh approximately 400 grams or close to 1 pound. Their skin is shiny, thin, and delicate. They may be injured or bruised from delivery. They will not move much and will have fused eyelids.

## If my baby survives, what should I expect?

### Intensive Care

- Extremely premature infants can be hospitalized for 4-5 months, or longer, before being discharged
- *Despite our best efforts*, some infants may die during their stay in the NICU due to severe infection, bleeding inside the brain, or difficulty breathing on a ventilator due to underdeveloped lungs
- These very premature babies are in their most fragile state during the first 2-3 weeks after birth
- Extremely premature infants undergo several daily procedures like blood draws and imaging studies
- NICU team members will make plans and prepare parents to hold their child *only* when it is safe to do so

11.9.2021

**Treatment is likely to include:**

- A breathing tube and breathing machine for at least 2–3 months after birth
- Multiple procedures including special intravenous (IV) therapy access
- IV medications, fluids, and nutrition
- Feeding tube insertion to give breast milk until they are able to eat on their own (around 34 weeks)
- Possible surgeries for eye, heart, or gut problems related to their prematurity

**If my baby survives, will they have disabilities?**

Babies born premature have a greater risk of disability. Up to 60% of infants born at 22 weeks will have some form of medical complexity in addition to serious health challenges. This may include loss of hearing or vision, a low IQ, or difficulty with movement. Early in their life, it is difficult for us to know if they will suffer from disabilities. Premature babies are followed by a developmental pediatrician, therapists, and sometimes other specialists to support them after their discharge from the NICU.

**Disability**

Among infants born at 22 – 23 weeks, up to 60% will have a serious health challenge

Disability	Movement	Intelligence	Hearing/Speech	Eyesight
Mild	Clumsiness or difficulty writing	Difficulty learning in school	Mild hearing loss	Needs glasses
Moderate	Cerebral palsy (may walk by themselves)	Learns slower than peers (will need support)	Permanent hearing problem corrected with hearing aids	Poor vision with glasses
Severe	Unable to walk without help	Very low (will need lifelong care)	Deaf: cannot hear even with hearing aids	Blind

\*Table adapted from Synnes et al. “Management of the Newborn Delivered at the Threshold of Viability.”

The NICU team will be there to support you as you learn what parenting in the NICU looks like. They will teach you to participate in cares for your infant, holding, bonding and much more.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, please let us know. A hospital chaplain, social worker and NICU family liaison are available for support as you process or grieve, and ultimately move through the next days and weeks.

11.9.2021