



Are You Beyond Stressed?

By Tami C. Gaines

Stress is a natural outcome of dealing with a premature birth. On August 25, 2009, *The New York Times* reported on post-traumatic stress disorder suffered by parents of premature babies who spend time in the neonatal intensive care unit (“NICU”). Both Duke University and Stanford University released reports that said the parents of premature babies experience multiple traumas that are termed “post-traumatic stress disorder” or PTSD, the effects of which could last for years. In **Preemie Parents®, 26 Ways to Grow with Your Premature Baby**, we discuss the importance of self-awareness. The first thing you should become aware of is when you are under stress during your NICU journey and how you deal with it. There are many unhealthy ways of dealing with stress, including:

- Smoking
- Drinking too much
- Overeating or under eating
- Zoning out for hours in front of the TV or computer
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities
- Using pills or drugs to relax
- Sleeping too much
- Procrastinating
- Filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing problems
- Taking out your stress on others (lashing out, angry outbursts, physical violence)

As an alternative, I’d like to offer some specific ways to deal with stress.

Journal about Your Feelings & Stress

There’s no better time to start journaling than when you are on your NICU journey. Make part of your entries, notes about those things that particularly cause you stress and note the way you deal with them. Is it a doctor, a nurse, your spouse? Each time you feel stressed, keep track of it in your journal. Review it on a regular basis so that you can see patterns and common themes. Write down:

- What caused your stress?
- How you felt, both physically and emotionally.
- How you acted in response or what you did to make yourself feel better.

Think About How You Cope with Stress Now



Think about the ways you currently manage and cope with stress in your life. Are your coping strategies healthy or unhealthy, helpful or unproductive? Unfortunately, many people cope with stress in ways that compound the problem. Look at the list above and then make a commitment to...

Learn Better Ways to Manage Stress

There are many healthy ways to manage and cope with stress, but they all require change. Since you can't do much to change your situation in the NICU, you must look to change the ways you deal with stress. Since everyone has a unique response to stress, there is no "one size fits all" solution to managing it. Here are a five of my favorite ways to reduce stress as told in ***Preemie Parents, 26 Ways to Grow with Your Premature Baby***.

1. Maintain your sense of humor. For me, humor opened up my heart to receive gifts, messages and blessings.
2. Breathe deeply. Inhale deeply through your nose. Exhale slowly through pursed lips.
3. Take 20 minutes to yourself every day. Whether reading, meditating, listening to music, these few minutes will take you farther than you could possibly imagine.
4. Focus on the positive. Being negative takes a lot of energy.
5. Avoid all people that cause you stress. Easier said than done right? Wrong! If you can't physically avoid someone then you can mentally run – in one ear and out the other.

Focus on what makes you feel calm and in control. That is where your power is.

To Your Transformation!

*Tami C. Gaines, the mother of four children (including premature twins born at just 25 weeks), has achieved national recognition as an advocate and spokesperson for parents of premature babies. With an M.B.A. from Columbia University and twenty-five years as an entrepreneur and executive, Tami could not have foreseen the events that would take her from the board room to the hospital room. Tami's book, **Preemie Parents: 26 Ways to Grow With Your Premature Baby** helps other parents of premature babies learn to cope -- as she has -- by opening their hearts to learning life's lessons. For more information and inspiration, visit www.PremieParents.com.*