

Occupational therapy and neonatal care in Northern Ireland

One in seven babies born in the UK are admitted to a neonatal unit each year because they were born before 37 weeks of pregnancy (preterm) or were unwell when born at full term.

The number of occupational therapists working in neonatal services is small – we currently have five neonatal occupational therapists in Northern Ireland – and posts are rarely full time. Our resources must, therefore, be used wisely to ensure maximum benefit for babies and their families.



What we do

Occupational therapists promote the neurodevelopment of babies who need neonatal care. We provide developmentally appropriate care, helping babies to sleep, feed, play, interact and regulate their body systems.

A key role for occupational therapists is enabling parents and carers to care for and nurture their baby's development. We help them learn about and respond to their baby's behavioural cues and signs of stress. We support parents to carry out activities such as settling and holding their baby, bathing them and helping them cope with medical procedures. We also help parents and carers with 'hidden' activities, such as decision making and interpreting their baby's behaviour. This is important because enabling parents and carers to bond with and care for their baby is crucial for infant development and parental wellbeing.

Occupational therapists also provide anticipatory guidance to promote babies' sensory, motor, attention, regulation and play development both during their neonatal admission and to prepare for their discharge home.

Further information about occupational therapy and neonatal care

New elearning about occupational therapy in neonatal care - RCOT

[Occupational therapy in neonatal services and early intervention - RCOT](#)

