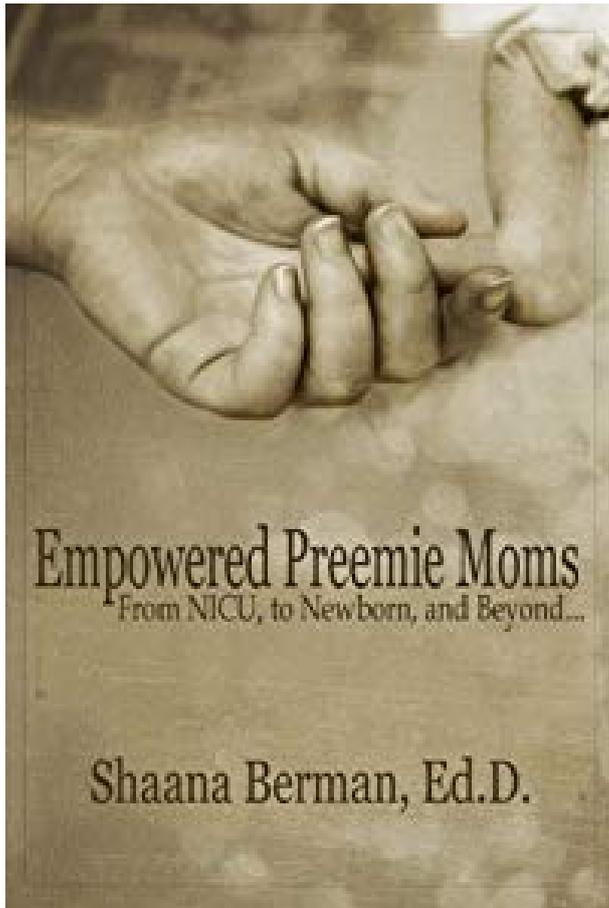


Empowered Premie Moms: From NICU, to Newborn, and Beyond



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The experiences of premie moms often detract sharply from the experiences of mothers who carry their babies to term. In fact, the surreal, clinical, and often traumatic things that premie moms endure make their labor, delivery, and parenting scenarios seem almost otherworldly in comparison to those of “termie” mommas. The current work describes how one premie mom, Shaana Berman, dealt with her own premature introduction to parenthood after developing HELLP syndrome. Her son, Jax, was delivered at 34 weeks, 5 days gestation, weighing just 3 pounds, 14 ounces.

As a special education specialist, Dr. Berman was shocked and dismayed when her life began to parallel her career. The NICU stay was challenging, but arriving at home was also frightening. Among other things, Jax battled severe reflux, brachycephaly, and was termed failure to thrive. Dr. Berman battled severe postpartum anxiety and depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and adrenal exhaustion in the aftermath of Jackson’s birth.

As she shuttled her premie to count doctor appointments, turned away numerous invitations to parties, shunned visitors, and avoided the supermarket like the plague, the author became increasingly more isolated.

One day, as Dr. Berman sat attached to a breast pump in the dead of the night, the former early childhood special education specialist began to wonder if other preemie moms were on a similar rollercoaster ride. In order to explore this idea further, Dr. Berman developed an anonymous, online survey and posted it on several popular preemie discussion boards. To her surprise, over 50 preemie moms responded, telling their stories and confirming that preemie moms share a special bond. While every preemie mom walks a unique path with her family, there is kind of comfort that only camaraderie derived from trauma can bring.

Sharing birth stories and challenges seems to be a vehicle that promotes bonding among preemie moms. Dr. Berman set out to document the stories these moms shared, in order to increase awareness regarding prematurity and the unique women's and parenting issues that preemie moms face. This book is divided into two sections. The first section relates the stories of ten preemie moms who had their babies during different stages of gestation (from 25-34.5 weeks). This organization is intentional, as the first thing a preemie mom often wants to share is their child's gestational age and weight at birth. Of the 50 responses, specific stories were selectively included to portray a range of preemie ages, weights, birth scenarios, and outcomes. Narratives were obtained by posting an anonymous survey on several preemie message boards, and on the author's Facebook page. All names and identifying information were changed to protect privacy, and some narratives were edited for flow and clarity. The survey responses were sorted by gestational age, and then coded to extract common themes and experiences. Coding revealed several common core issues that arise during the preemie postnatal experience. The second section of *Empowered Preemie Moms* outlines survival tips based on these commonalities. The work as a whole is intended to help preemie moms navigate their preemie rollercoaster rides and achieve a sense of power and control over their situations, rather than succumbing to feelings of isolation and anxiety. This is a non-fiction book based on research. It is offered as a survival guide, an inspirational journey, and a resource for preemie parents and their families.