

Hudson's family had a rough time even before he was born. His mother was diagnosed with placenta abruption, a condition where the placental lining separates from the uterus of the mother, and was advised that her pregnancy was likely to end in miscarriage. By week 20 of her pregnancy Hudson's mom was admitted to the hospital full-time, and Hudson was born during an emergency caesarian at 26 weeks and 4 days, weighing only 2.5 pounds.

Hudson was quickly transferred to the Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) and after a few frustrating and stressful commutes from their home in Bowmanville, ON, his parents found out about Ronald McDonald House Toronto.

"When we first walked through the House our eyes were welled with tears. We just couldn't believe that this was a real place. We kind of expected that it was going to be like a hotel room, and then we found out that there is a gym, a full kitchen, with volunteer groups who cook for us 3 or 4 times a week [Home for Dinner Program] and we could use the Subaru car. It's more of a home than a hotel," says Hudson's mom.

In the time that Hudson's family stayed at Ronald McDonald House Toronto, he doubled his birth weight. According to his dad, "skin-to-skin contact with a baby is so crucial. We've been able to give him so much of that contact and because of that, he's been able to grow and get strong."

He believes that the House played a huge role in their son's progress. "If we were at home, it would be such a hassle and so difficult financially and emotionally, between us and our two other children it would be very difficult to come every day. It probably wouldn't have been possible. But, because we've been able to be right here, with a 3 minute walk to the hospital, we've have had no real stressors. There's a countless list of items that are provided. It's just been amazing."

Hudson's mom adds "When we were at the grocery store the other day, we realized 'we don't even have to think about toilet paper right now!' all we had to do was focus on our son – that is just the biggest blessing in the world."

Hudson's parents were also thrilled that they were able to create a home-like environment where their whole family could be together, especially after being apart during Hudson's mom's six-week stay at the hospital before he was born. While Hudson's mom would go to SickKids each day to spend time with him, his dad stayed at the House taking care of Hudson's older siblings. "We did the craft room as much as we could, Kid's Kitchen, the Music Program, we went up to the library and read books, we spent hours in the Clubhouse; our 3-year-old knows how to ride a bike now. We were very concerned about Hudson, but we were also

concerned about his brother and sister, because to have everything turned upside-down for 6 or 7 weeks can change you, but they loved it at Ronald McDonald House Toronto."

Making friendships with other families at the House also stood out for Hudson's parents. "Hearing everyone's stories and having a sense of community of all the people going through a hard time; you can really support each other through it together. It's really hard to leave them because they're lifelong friends and we'll stay in contact. No-one really knows what it's like to have a sick child until you go through it and to be able to relate on that level is huge" says Hudson's mom.

Hudson's parents are incredibly thankful for everyone who makes Ronald McDonald House Toronto possible. "Thank you for easing the burden of such a difficult time in our lives" Hudson's dad says. "It's unreal to think that we were able to create a home environment here, to create a routine so that our kids could stay stable. From the bottom of my heart thank you to everyone who has donated and who have helped make this happen. And thank you to all the people who drop money in the coin box [at McDonald's] – you have no idea how much your donations add up and how because of that, you are literally changing lives."