

MECONIUM ASPIRATION SYNDROME

What is meconium?

Meconium is the first bowel motion that a baby passes. A baby can pass meconium while it is still inside the uterus.

What is meconium aspiration syndrome (MAS)?

Meconium aspiration syndrome occurs when a baby has passed meconium into the amniotic fluid (fluid surrounding the baby) and then breathed in the fluid. The meconium may then pass into the baby's lungs.

What does aspirating meconium do?

Aspirating meconium can result in a baby having trouble breathing and maintaining an adequate blood oxygen level.

Who is at risk of MAS?

Babies who are born past their due date are most at risk. Women who are over 41 weeks gestation are encouraged to have their labor induced to try and prevent this from occurring.

Term babies who have or are suffering some fetal distress (shortage of oxygen) may pass meconium and subsequently inhale it.

Babies who have growth restriction (poor growth) are also at risk.

How do we manage MAS?

If your baby has passed meconium prior to delivery and does not breathe spontaneously the neonatal medical staff will pass a tube into the airway of your baby (intubate) and suction meconium from the airway (trachea). Some meconium may have been inhaled further into the smaller airways and cannot be removed.

If your baby breathes soon after birth and shows signs of having difficulty breathing he/she will need admission to the nursery to assess and assist their breathing if required. Respiratory support may include oxygen in their cot, nasal continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) where small plastic prongs placed in the baby's nose provide oxygen and air under pressure, or ventilation where your baby has their breathing supported by a machine.

If your baby requires a ventilator for MAS we will give some Surfactant (a medicine placed down the endotracheal tube) which helps the lungs to recover from the damage caused by inhaling the meconium. Your baby may need other kinds of support such as intravenous antibiotics, blood pressure support and special ventilators.

These will be discussed with you by the medical and nursing staff.

Are there any long term consequences of MAS?

The majority of babies with MAS survive. Some babies may need extra oxygen for a couple of weeks afterwards. However, these babies grow up with no long-term respiratory problems. If there have been concerns that your baby suffered some fetal distress, close observation of your baby's development may be required. This will be discussed with you by the medical staff.

If you have any further questions please ask the medical and nursing staff.

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