

REDUCING PAIN/DISCOMFORT FOR BABIES DURING PAINFUL PROCEDURES - SUCROSE

Your baby may require tests or procedures that could cause discomfort or pain. These tests and procedures will only be undertaken if absolutely necessary. It is important that your baby is offered support and comfort during this time.

There are many ways in which pain and discomfort can be reduced. These include breastfeeding or sweet solutions such as sucrose to reduce discomfort or swaddling your baby during and after the procedure. If you are unable to breastfeed then it is important that your baby is offered the opportunity of non-nutritive sucking at this time.

Small amounts of sweet solutions such as expressed breast milk (EBM) and sucrose can help reduce discomfort and pain. These can be given to your baby via a syringe to the top of the tongue just before the procedure.

If your baby's pain is more severe or the procedure takes more time an analgesic drug can be given to your baby to reduce their pain.

Circumstances that may cause your baby pain

During your baby's stay in hospital, your baby may require procedures to be undertaken for medical reasons. These may include:

Tests and treatments – all newborn babies require a newborn screening test within the first week of life. This requires blood to be collected. Other more extensive tests may be needed when your baby is in the NICU or special care nursery.

Skin Punctures – are performed to obtain samples of blood for various tests during your baby's hospital stay. Most punctures are performed on the heel using a special lance or by placing a needle into a vein in your baby's hand or foot or sometimes arm.

Tubes – may be inserted through the baby's nose or mouth for feeding. Breathing tubes may be inserted into the baby's airway using the mouth or nose. Sometimes a tube may be placed into your baby's chest or abdomen for special procedures.

A surgical operation – some babies may require an operation in the first month of life and pain can result from the procedure and last for several days after the operation.

Why Managing Pain is Important

Pain Relief – the pain your newborn may experience is expressed in their behaviour, facial expressions and changes such as their heart beating faster or their blood pressure and colour changing. The pain relief used can be simple, such as giving a small amount of sucrose onto their tongue or giving a breastfeed two minutes prior to the procedure. More severe pain may be relieved by continuously giving a pain relieving medication through a vein or sometimes into the stomach.

Long-term Effects (memory) – some studies have shown that babies who have experienced many painful procedures in early life may show changes in their behaviour in later childhood.

How can you support your baby during painful procedures?

Identifying your baby's responses – you can assist the nurses and doctors by describing your baby's responses to them. The nurses may assess your baby's signals by using a standardised chart.

Breast feeding – studies have shown that breastfeeding reduces the pain experienced by a baby during a single painful procedure. If you are breastfeeding it can be helpful to give your baby a breastfeed a couple of minutes before the procedure.

Oral sucrose – similarly, by placing a small amount of sweet solution (sucrose) on the baby's tongue and offering a dummy during a painful procedure can reduce the amount of pain and crying. If you are not breastfeeding then ask the nurses to provide some sucrose for your baby prior to the procedure.

Swaddling – wrapping babies in a fabric cloth to support them during and after painful procedures helps them contain their response to pain such as crying and agitation. If a procedure is required that is likely to cause your baby pain you can comfort your baby by holding or supporting them during the procedure.

Odour – studies have shown that familiar smells such as your breast milk or skin can have a calming effect on term and preterm babies during blood collection.

Being present during procedures – holding your baby during a procedure may comfort your baby, however you may decide this is too uncomfortable for you to do.

When your baby is home

Sucrose is safe for babies and helps reduce pain during painful procedures in the first few months of life.

When you take your baby home, sweet solutions such as sugared water or honey should **not** be used. Once your baby begins to teethe then sweet solutions can contribute to dental caries. Honey is not recommended for infants under 12 months of age, as honey may cause infant botulism.

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

fact sheet