

Introduction

While in hospital, either in the post natal wards, the neonatal intensive care unit or special care baby unit, 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.

Your local neonatal team

If you have any questions or would like to know more about the management of your baby's pain, please ask the nurse, midwife or doctor caring for your baby

Sources:

Franck, Allen, Cox & Winter (2005) Parent's views about infant pain in neonatal intensive care. *Clinical Journal of Pain*. 21(2):133- 139.

Women's and Children's Hospital Pain Service Poster, SA, June 2005. Minimising distress for your baby during minor procedures.

Sucrose is not used to comfort your baby. It is used specifically for the management of pain caused by the procedures and tests your baby may require.

Reducing pain or discomfort for your baby during painful procedures in



Information for Families



Causes of pain in infants

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 SCN.

Skin Punctures – are performed to obtain samples of blood for various tests during your baby's stay in hospital. 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.



Explanation of pain

Pain Relief. The pain your newborn baby may experience is expressed in their behaviour, facial expression and changes such as their heart beating faster or changes in blood pressure or colour. The pain relief used can be simple, such as giving a small amount of sucrose onto their tongue or giving a breast feed 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 their early life may show changes in their behaviour in later childhood.

How parents can support their 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 standard chart.

How To Comfort Your Baby. If a procedure is required that is likely to cause your baby pain you can comfort the baby by holding or supporting them during the procedure. If you are breastfeeding it can be helpful to give your baby a breastfeed a couple of minutes before the procedure. If you are not breastfeeding then ask the nurses to provide some sucrose for your baby prior to the procedure.

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.

Managing your baby's pain

Breast feeding. Studies have shown that breastfeeding reduces the pain experienced by a baby during a single painful 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.

Swaddling. Wrapping babies in a fabric cloth to support them during and after a painful procedure helps them contain their response to pain such as crying and agitation.

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

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 teeth 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.