

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Sucrose for pain relief for babies on the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)

Do babies experience pain?

Babies are able to feel and express pain from birth. While on the neonatal unit it may be necessary for us to undertake uncomfortable procedures, such as taking blood samples and putting in drips (cannulae).

Healthcare experts have researched ways to assess and manage pain in newborns, and we aim to minimise any potential discomfort to your baby while on the unit.

How can we minimise pain?

- Blood tests and injections are kept to a minimum, using the finest needles possible and taking the smallest quantities of blood.
- A sweet tasting solution such as **sucrose** can be given for pain relief before and during the procedure. It is usually given two or three minutes before the procedure and can be given up to four times in any single day.
- Where possible, care and procedures are performed at the same time, so your baby has long periods of rest.

Why sucrose?

The sucrose solution we use is specially prepared from the same substance used as table sugar. It is widely used across the world for pain relief in young babies. Research shows that just a few drops of sweet taste will reduce a painful experience. It is believed that tasting this sweet solution produces a natural release of the body's own painkillers.

Sucrose is only effective when given orally and needs to be placed on the front part of the baby's tongue, where most of the taste buds are located. Sucrose can be put onto your baby's tongue by syringe or by using a dummy.

What about alternatives?

Breast milk is sweet too, but shown not to be as effective as sucrose. This does not mean breast milk should not be considered as an option, but does suggest feeding at the breast is unlikely to be more effective.

If your baby is well enough to feed, you can put them to the breast two or three minutes before minor procedures.

Non-nutritive sucking on a dummy has been shown to help reduce pain in neonates and is particularly appropriate where babies are “nil by mouth” and cannot be handled or moved out of the incubator.

However, dummies encourage a form of sucking which is different from that used during breastfeeding and should be used only during uncomfortable procedures.

Is using sucrose safe?

Many studies have shown that sucrose is safe and effective for pain relief in young babies.

Who decides whether my baby will receive sucrose?

The team of doctors and nurses caring for your baby will assess whether it is appropriate for your baby to receive sucrose before a procedure. Please tell us if you would prefer that sucrose was not given to your baby.

What if my baby has longer lasting pain?

If your baby has ongoing pain, paracetamol or something stronger will be used after further assessment.

How do we recognise my baby is in pain?

There are a number of things that we look at:

- Facial expressions such as a grimace, eyes tightly shut, mouth stretched open with a tense and curled tongue.
- Crying, which is high pitched, harsh and loud.

- Body movements, for example thrashing of limbs, arching of the back, becoming limp or flaccid, especially a premature infant.
- Heart rate, breathing rate and blood pressure.

How can you help your baby?

As parents, you are vital members of the team. Staff can teach you how to recognise when your baby is in pain or stressed and show you ways to help. There are many things you can do to help:

- The simple act of touching your baby during a painful procedure can lessen both anxiety and pain.
- Containment holding - place your hand firmly but gently on your baby's head, place your other hand either on your baby's tummy or around the legs and bottom.
- Kangaroo care, or skin-to-skin contact between a parent and infant, also has a pain-relieving effect.
- Changing baby's position and providing boundaries so they are snuggled in a nest.
- Breastfeeding (although it is not always possible in the NICU due to baby being too ill or too small) has been shown to reduce pain and stress in babies.
- Non-nutritive sucking (allowing your baby to suck on your finger or a dummy) can also relieve pain and reduce stress from procedures such as heel pricks.

If you are present on the unit and wish to remain with your baby during the procedure, we can advise you how you can comfort your baby in these ways. Alternatively, one of the nurses or doctors may do this on your behalf.

If you have any questions, please ask one of the nurses or doctors on the unit.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you need this information in a different language or format, please contact the PET (as above).

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515,

extension 6927.

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