

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Probiotics

What are probiotics?

Probiotics are sometimes called “**friendly bacteria**”. They help keep your baby's **gut (bowel) healthy**.

Babies who are born early are called **premature babies**. Premature babies may not have enough friendly bacteria in their gut. This can let other bacteria grow and upset the balance of bacteria in the gut. An upset balance of bacteria may increase the risk of a bowel problem called **necrotising enterocolitis (NEC)**.

What is NEC?

NEC is a serious bowel problem that mostly affects premature babies. It can make the bowel become swollen and sore. If NEC is serious, it can be life-threatening.

There are many things that can cause NEC. An upset balance of bacteria in the gut is just one possible cause. Probiotics can help put more friendly bacteria into the gut, which may help stop harmful bacteria from growing too much.

Research also shows that probiotics may:

- Lower the risk of NEC.
- Lower the risk of some infections.
- Help more premature babies survive.

How are probiotics given to my baby?

Your baby will usually start having probiotics within **24 hours of being born**.

Probiotics are usually given once a day. They may be given through a small tube. The tube goes into your baby's tummy through their:

- Nose. This is called a **nasogastric tube**.
- Mouth. This is called an **orogastric tube**.

How long will my baby have probiotics?

If your baby was born **before 32 weeks**, they will usually have probiotics until they reach **34 weeks corrected age**.

If your baby was born **after 32 weeks** but is small, they will usually have probiotics until they are ready to go home.

If your baby stops having milk feeds or becomes unwell, we will stop the probiotics. The probiotics can start again when your baby is better and/or has started having feeds again.

Are probiotics safe?

Research shows that probiotics are generally safe for premature babies.

There is a **small risk** that probiotics can cause an infection. If this happens, the infection can be treated. The risk of a serious bowel problem called NEC is greater than the risk of an infection from probiotics.

Can I say no to probiotics?

Yes. You can choose not to give your baby probiotics, but you can also change your mind at any time. You can talk to the neonatal team if you have any questions or worries.

What if I have questions?

Please speak to a member of the **neonatal team**. They can answer your questions and talk to you about your baby's care.

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 would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

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