

Pain Leaflet (Neonatal Unit)

Information for parents

This leaflet contains information on how to recognise when your baby is in pain or discomfort and suggests various ways that you can comfort your baby.

While your baby is with us on the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), we sometimes need staff to carry out procedures and investigations which may cause some pain or discomfort to your baby. NICU staff use a number of ways to reduce pain in babies.

The staff will regularly assess your baby for pain and discomfort using the Neonatal Pain, Agitation and Sedation Scale (NPASS). This assessment tool takes into consideration gestational age and reliable pain indicators, such as:

- Facial expressions
- Behaviour
- Body movements
- Crying/Irritability
- Vital Signs

We will assess your baby at least once every shift and the score will be documented and acted upon. Parents can be involved in the scoring process.

Your baby's pain will be scored accordingly - Different pain relief measures will be used depending on the pain score. If the score is high the Nurse will give your baby some pain relief and if the score falls below 0 then weaning your baby of sedation may be considered. See NPASS in your baby's cot side folder for details.

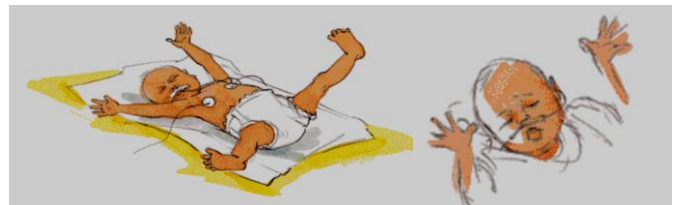
Signs that I am comfortable

- Hands near face or mouth.
- I am in a curled up position.
- I have my feet together.
- I have a relaxed expression on my face.
- I can look you in the eyes, even if it is only briefly.



Signs that I am feeling uncomfortable

- I am thrusting my arms and legs rigidly into the air.
- I am arching my back.
- I am frowning or scowling.
- I am spreading my fingers and toes out.
- I am moaning or crying.
- I am yawning or have hiccoughs during my treatment or care.



Different methods of pain relief

If your baby is ventilated, often pain relief will be given intravenously (through a drip) - The drug which is frequently used is called morphine. The Nurse caring for your baby will ensure your baby receives the most appropriate pain relief.

The score will help the Nurse to assess if the pain relief is adequate and the most appropriate for your baby.

If your baby is going to have an investigation or a procedure, such as a lumbar puncture (a procedure which takes a small sample of spinal fluid to detect whether there is an infection) or blood test, your baby can be given the most appropriate pain relief.

If your baby is not ventilated but appears to be in pain or discomfort the Nurse may use other forms of pain relief, e.g. paracetamol.

The Nurse may also:

- Reposition your baby using positioning aids, such as a rolled blanket or nest to provide comfort and security.
- Move your baby's hand to their mouth so that your baby can help to comfort themselves - 'self sooth'.
- Dim the lights or use an incubator cover to reduce over stimulation.
- Offer your baby a dummy or sucrose/breastmilk mouthcare (see below).
- Encourage quiet time.



What can I do to make my baby more comfortable?

There are various ways to make your baby more comfortable and settled. Sometimes, babies enjoy a 'still hold' more than stroking or patting, which could cause overstimulation. The Nurse may suggest that you put your hands into the incubator and let one hand just rest on your baby's head and the other one onto your baby's middle. This is called 'containment holding'. This helps to make your baby feel secure, relaxed and loved.



Remember, that it is always important to wash and dry your hands, roll up your sleeves, and remove your watch and any jewellery before touching your baby as this will reduce the chance of spreading infection.

If your baby is well enough, then laying your baby directly onto your skin is a good way to calm and relax them and it also encourages bonding between you and your baby. Research shows that this contact can calm a baby's breathing and heart rate. The staff on the NICU will encourage you and your partner to have 'skin to skin' contact with your baby. You may also hear this being called 'kangaroo care'.

Sometimes the staff may feel that your baby has had to deal with a lot of stress and disturbance and they may suggest that it would be best to allow your baby to rest and sleep for a while so that they can regain their strength.

Remember, if you find that your baby likes to be comforted in a particular way, please let the staff know.



The use of dummies on the NICU

When your baby is admitted to the NICU, the staff will ask your permission to use a dummy and/or give your baby sucrose/your breastmilk for procedures which may cause discomfort. Sucking on a dummy with or without sucrose/your breastmilk during procedures is an effective way of helping to reduce pain and stress in your baby.

If you would like any more information about pain assessment and treatment, please ask a member of NICU staff. **Together we can provide the best care for your baby.**

This leaflet is available in audio, Braille, large print and other languages. To request a copy, please ask a member of staff.

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Because you  matter