

# Protecting your baby from low blood glucose



## Information for parents and carers

Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Jessop Wing

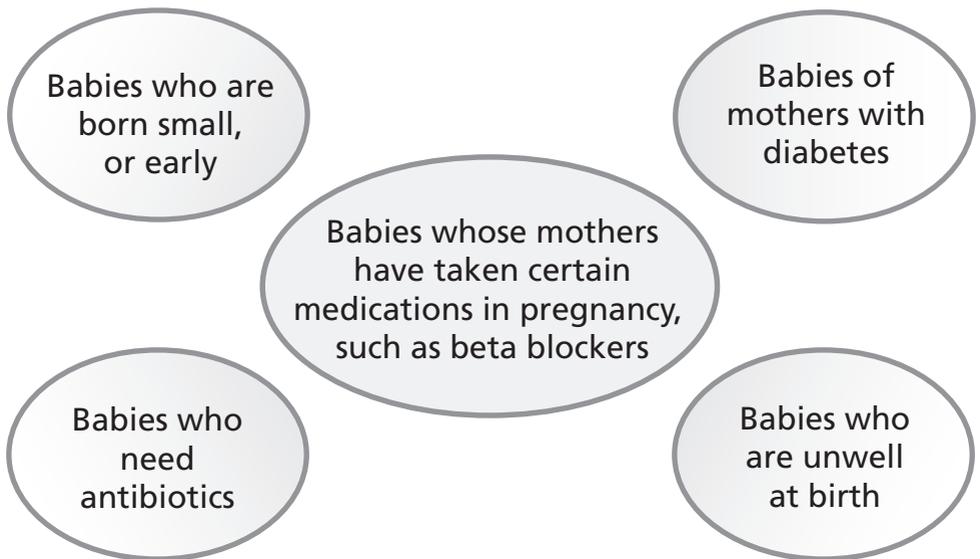




## What is low blood glucose?

After birth, most babies are able to maintain a normal blood glucose level whilst they establish feeding, but some are at risk of low blood glucose (also called low blood sugar or hypoglycaemia). If this is recognised and treated quickly, it is unlikely to cause harm, but if not recognised and treated, extremely low blood glucose could result in brain injury, and lead to problems with your baby's development. However this is extremely rare and the midwives, nurses and doctors looking after you and your baby will ensure that babies at risk of low blood glucose get the correct treatment.

### Babies at risk of low blood glucose



Your baby is in one of these groups. It is recommended that babies in an "at risk" group have some blood tests to check their blood glucose level.

## How is my baby's blood glucose tested?

Your baby's blood glucose is tested by a heel-prick. This can be carried out whilst you are holding your baby. Only one drop of blood is needed, and the results are available immediately.

The first blood test is done around 2-4 hours after birth, before your baby's second feed and again approximately 3 hours after this. If two consecutive results are normal, the blood tests will stop.

Your baby's temperature, heart rate and breathing rate will be recorded alongside the blood tests. This will be continued over the first 24 hours.

You and your baby will need to stay in hospital for the first 24 hours.

## How can I reduce the risk of low blood glucose for my baby?

The best way to avoid low blood glucose is to keep your baby warm and fed.

### You can help to keep your baby warm by:

Skin-to-skin  
contact, covered  
with a warm  
blanket

Keeping a hat on  
your baby in the  
first few days

Keeping your  
baby dressed  
when they're not  
in skin-to-skin  
contact

## You can encourage your baby to feed by:

Feeding your baby as soon as possible after birth

Responding to baby's feeding cues

Feeding your baby at least every 3 hours

Keeping your baby close with constant access to your breast

Use your 'Mothers and others guide...' for help

Expressing colostrum for your baby

If you've chosen to formula feed, staff will advise how much to offer your baby

**Ask for help!**  
However you have chosen to feed your baby, staff are always happy to help

## What happens if my baby's blood glucose is low?

If your baby's blood glucose is low, you should encourage your baby to feed as soon as possible. Your baby will also be given some dextrose (sugar) gel on the inside of their cheek as part of the feeding plan; this is an effective way to increase your baby's blood glucose level. Another blood test will be done 2 to 4 hours before the next feed. The blood tests will be continued until two consecutive results are normal.

If you are breastfeeding and your baby is reluctant to feed, a member of staff will support you to hand express your milk directly into your

baby's mouth, or it can be given by a special baby feeding cup. You may be advised to offer some infant formula; this may only be for one feed, or the first few. We will ask for your consent before this happens. It is important to continue to offer breastfeeds and try to express milk as often as possible.

Very occasionally, babies are very sleepy and will not feed, or despite feeding well their blood glucose is still low. These babies may need to be admitted to the Neonatal Unit. Staff will explain why, and what treatment may be needed. If you are breastfeeding, you will be encouraged to continue with that and/or express milk for your baby.

All mothers will be encouraged to spend as much time as possible with their baby on the Neonatal Unit.

## **How can I tell if my baby is well?**

Staff will monitor your baby's condition, but there are things you can look out for as well.

### **Is my baby feeding well?**

In the first 24 hours your baby should feed at least every 3 hours or until the blood glucose is stable. After this a baby should feed at least 8 times in 24 hours.

If you are breastfeeding you can use the leaflet 'Breastfeeding is going well when...' to help. This leaflet is in your Admission Pack. However you have chosen to feed your baby, staff will support you with feeding until you feel confident.

### **Is my baby warm and responsive?**

Your baby should feel warm to touch, however their hands and feet may feel cool. When your baby is awake, they should respond to your voice.

## **Is my baby's breathing and colour normal?**

Look at the colour of your baby's lips and tongue; they should be pink.

It is normal for babies to have irregular breathing, sometimes pausing and then breathing very fast for a few seconds.

If you notice that:

- your baby is breathing very fast for a prolonged period,
- their nose is flaring with very deep chest movements, or
- they are making noises with each breath,

tell a member of staff.

**If you are worried about your baby whilst in hospital for any reason, tell a member of staff straight away.**

## **When can my baby and I go home?**

We recommend that you and your baby stay in hospital for at least 24 hours after birth. After that, if blood glucose is stable, your baby is feeding well, and there are no other risk factors, you should be able to go home.

As with all new-born babies, you should continue to look for signs that your baby is well, and seek medical advice if you have any concerns.



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