

Oesophageal Atresia with Tracheo-oesophageal Fistula

This leaflet offers more information about oesophageal atresia with tracheo-oesophageal fistula. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is oesophageal atresia?

Oesophageal atresia (OA) is a rare condition where the oesophagus (food pipe) is blind-ended and does not connect to the stomach. This means food and secretions cannot pass from the mouth to the stomach.

What is tracheo-oesophageal fistula?

Tracheo-oesophageal fistula (TOF) is a related pattern of abnormal development. It is a connection between the oesophagus and trachea. This connection is called a fistula or trachea-oesophageal fistula.

How are they diagnosed?

Occasionally an OA and TOF can be suspected on an antenatal scan by an absent or small stomach in the setting of polyhydramnios (increased fluid surrounding your baby).

But more often OA and TOF are diagnosed soon after birth. Following birth your baby may have excess oral secretions and problems feeding. Part of confirming the diagnosis involves the nurse trying to pass a naso-gastric tube (NG tube) through your baby's nose into their stomach, then a chest and abdominal X-ray is performed. If the tube fails to pass into the stomach and on X-ray the tube can be seen coiled in the oesophagus this will confirm OA.

What causes them?

We do not know what causes OA and TOF. It is rare and occurs in 1 in 3,500 births. Some babies with OA and TOF can have other problems with their kidneys, bottom (anorectal abnormalities) and spine, rarely heart and limbs. The doctors will examine your baby closely to check if this is the case.

Feeding

Your baby will not be able to receive any milk until after the surgery to repair their oesophagus. The nursing staff will teach you how to express and store your milk to feed to your baby when they are ready.

How are OA/TOF treated?

Once the condition is diagnosed it is important to stop milk feeds. Fluids will be given by a drip. A special tube (repleg tube) will be passed through the baby's nose into the blind-ended oesophagus to drain the secretions (saliva) that are swallowed but cannot pass into the stomach.

What does the operation involve?

The aim of the operation is to close the fistula and repair the oesophagus. The method to repair the OA depends on the distance between the two ends of the oesophagus. In most cases the two ends are joined together to form a continuous passage from the throat to the stomach.

In rare cases the distance between the two ends of the oesophagus is too large for the surgeon to be able to join them straightaway, this is known as 'long gap OA' and different treatment is needed. If this is likely to be the case, the doctors will explain this to you.

What happens after the operation?

Your baby will come back to the neonatal unit to recover. After the operation, your baby will need help with breathing so will be connected to a ventilator. All babies are closely monitored after the operation. He or she will also be given pain relief through the 'drip'.

During the operation a feeding tube (nasogastric tube) will have been passed through your baby's nose into their stomach. This tube is called a trans-anastomotic tube (TAT) and will be used a few days later when your baby is able to restart milk feeds. Meanwhile it is important they do not pull out this tube as it protects the area where the surgeon has made the join. We suggest your baby should wear mittens on their hands immediately following surgery until the TAT is removed. The mittens can be removed for washing their hands and while you are there to supervise them. Your baby will start anti-reflux (antacid) medicine to help protect the area where the two ends were joined (anastomosis).

While your baby's operation site heals, he or she will be fed through a drip into the veins with parenteral nutrition (PN). As your baby recovers milk feeds will be started slowly through the TAT. Once your baby is tolerating their full amount of milk and the surgeon is happy you will be able to feed him or her from the breast or bottle.

Discharge and follow-up

This depends on your baby's recovery and how long it has taken them to achieve and complete oral feeds. This is usually about seven to ten days.

Your baby will need to continue taking their anti-reflux medication for up to one year and will have follow up appointments with the surgical and medical team.

Babies who have OA with TOF repaired can encounter some complications and you should seek medical advice if your baby:

- is coughing or choking when feeding
- has difficulty in swallowing saliva or feeds
- is failing to gain weight.

If your baby is unwell you should go to A&E otherwise you can contact the paediatric surgical registrar through **St George's Hospital switchboard on 020 8672 1255**.

If St George's Hospital is not your local hospital

Once your baby has had surgery and made a good recovery, i.e. when their specialist medical and nursing requirements are less, the baby will be transferred back to the care of your local hospital. This transfer is a sign of progress and will not occur until the baby is ready. It will allow you to be closer to home and become familiar with your local healthcare professionals.

Useful sources of information

BLISS

Bliss is a support group which is able to offer support and advice to families with babies with a range of conditions.

68 South Lambeth Road
London SW8 1RL



BLISS Helpline: 0870 7700 337

Email: Information@bliss.org.uk

Website: www.bliss.org.uk

Use your smartphone to scan the QR code (you may need to download a QR code scanning

TOFs

TOFS (Tracheo-Oesophageal Fistula Support) is a charity dedicated to improving the lives of all who were born with the TOF condition. The charity also takes an active role in supporting [research](#) into the causes and implications of these conditions.

Web: www.tofs.org.uk

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111



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