

Your Preterm Baby

This information aims to make you feel informed about potential issues which your baby might have during their hospital stay due to being preterm.

If you have any further questions, then please speak to your midwife or a member of the neonatal team.

What is preterm?

We consider any baby born before 37 weeks to be preterm (NHS 2019).

Low Blood Sugars (Hypoglycaemia)

Your baby will be monitored for at least the first 72 hours of life to ensure their blood sugars are within a normal range. Our threshold level is 2.6 mmol/L. If the blood sugar falls below this level, we will talk to you about feeding and see how we can support you further. Your baby will have three pre-feed blood sugar tests in a row, then at 24, 36, 48 and 72 hours of age. We check this by taking a small amount of blood via a heel prick before your baby is about to have a feed. Feed your baby as they show feeding cues and with gaps of no longer than three hours in between feeds.

Jaundice

Jaundice is the yellow colouration of the skin, eyes and mucous membranes (NHS, 2018). It's very common – around 80% of preterm infants and 60% of term infants (NICE 2018) will become jaundiced. Not all infants who have jaundice will need treatment for it. If we are concerned about your baby looking jaundiced, we will check their levels with a heel prick blood test. You may notice your baby becoming increasingly yellow, lethargic and they may be reluctant to feed. If your baby does need treatment, they can usually have this on the postnatal ward and they will receive a treatment called phototherapy (NHS, 2018). We measure the jaundice levels regularly and we will let you know when your baby can stop phototherapy.

Low temperature (Hypothermia)

Preterm babies are more likely to have a lower temperature than a term baby as they are usually smaller and have less fat. We recommend that you have as much skin to skin contact as possible as this helps to regulate your baby's temperature, among other benefits such as bonding and for milk production (UNICEF 2019). While in the cot make sure the baby is appropriately dressed (usually one more layer than adults, however depending on the temperature of the ward you may need extra/fewer layers). Soon after birth we suggest putting a hat on your baby, but we don't recommend that your baby sleeps with a hat on at home (Lullaby trust, 2020). We will check your baby's temperature frequently, as being cold can lead to low blood sugars, breathing problems and weight loss.

Weight loss

We will weigh your baby on day 3 and again on day 5 if you are still in hospital, otherwise this will be done in the community. We expect new-borns to lose weight in their first week of life (NHS, 2020), but we want to make sure it's not more than a 10% loss. If your baby has lost more than 10% we will implement an individualised feeding plan to help your baby gain weight. We will weigh your baby again prior to going home to ensure they are gaining weight appropriately.

If you have any questions regarding any of the above then please speak to your midwife or a member of the neonatal team.

References:

Lullaby trust (2020). The safest room temperature for babies. [online] available at: [The safest room temperature for babies - The Lullaby Trust](#)

NHS (2018) Newborn Jaundice [Online] Available at: [Newborn jaundice - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

NHS (2019) Preterm labour and birth. [online] Available at: [Premature labour and birth - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

NHS (2020) Your baby's weight and height. [online] Available at: [Your baby's weight and height - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

NICE (2016) Jaundice in newborn babies under 28 days. [Online] Available at: [Overview | Jaundice in newborn babies under 28 days | Guidance | NICE](#)

UNICEF (2019) Skin-to-skin contact [online] Available at: [Skin-to-skin contact - Baby Friendly Initiative \(unicef.org.uk\)](#)

Useful sources of information

- UNICEF
- Lullaby Trust

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your baby please speak to one of the Midwives on the ward who are looking after you.

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 wings (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

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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