

Pain relief and your baby

Other formats

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If my baby is small or premature, can he/she feel pain?

Your baby can feel pain whatever their size or age. However, babies born early may not be able to settle or feel secure as quickly as an older baby might. Some research suggests that some premature babies can experience pain just from being touched. Current research shows that a baby's early experience of pain may influence how they react to pain when they are older.

Will my baby experience any pain?

In order for the Special Care team to care for your baby, protect them from illness and detect any problems early, your baby may need to have some tests and procedures. Some of these are painful. Babies who have more problems will often need more procedures. However, staff can teach you how to recognise when your baby is in pain and show you ways to help.

How can we minimise pain?

Painful tests and procedures such as bloods and injections are kept to a minimum; we use the finest needles possible and take the smallest quantities of blood. Where possible, care and procedures are performed at the same time to allow your baby to have adequate time to rest.

Sucrose can be given as pain relief before and during any painful procedure. Research shows that the most effective pain relieving methods to use for minor painful procedures is use of sucrose in combination with a pacifier, but sucrose is the best single method to use. We will ask consent to use sucrose with/without a dummy or pacifier for pain relief during painful procedures.

What is sucrose and why do we use it?

Sucrose is a sweet solution which is placed on your baby's tongue just before painful procedures. Sucrose is now widely used across the world for short-term pain relief in babies.

Research shows that just a small amount of sucrose can reduce the amount of pain experienced by babies.

Is using sucrose safe?

At present, research shows that sucrose is a safe and effective method of pain relief. Administering sucrose does not affect feeding as the amount given is so small.

Can breast milk be used as pain relief?

Breast milk is sweet too, but some studies have shown it is not as effective as sucrose. However, if you prefer breast milk to be used instead of sucrose, please speak to a member of staff. If your baby is well enough to feed, then you may be able to put him/her to the breast during the procedure if this is practical.

What are the benefits of using a pacifier/dummy?

Babies use dummies for non-nutritive sucking and comfort. Non-nutritive sucking is when a baby sucks without getting any milk. During a procedure it may not be possible for you to feed or hold your baby, and so a dummy is the best way to comfort them. Research has shown that non-nutritive sucking reduces the pain experienced by a baby.

Babies often become upset during uncomfortable procedures. The most effective pain relief is to use a dummy and sucrose. If you wish you can bring in your own dummy from home, however, if your baby is premature, SCBU has specially designed dummies for small mouths. This may be best for your baby until he/she has grown a little.

In addition to using pacifiers for pain relief, they are also used on the ward:

- to help your baby settle
- for comfort
- when they are not having any feeds
- when they are receiving help with their breathing using CPAP
- if they are pre-term babies and are having tube feed
- for babies with mouth abnormalities

The use of dummies is associated with reduced risk of cot death.

Are there any problems associated with using dummies?

Problems linked with using dummies whilst in SCBU:

- **Difficulty in establishing breastfeeding.** Sucking on a dummy is different from sucking at the breast and it is felt that the baby may get confused.

Research has not shown any short-term problems caused by premature or sick babies using a dummy. However, due to the differences between sucking a dummy and suckling at the breast, as soon as your baby is able to take more feeds at the breast, then the use of the pacifier should be limited so that your baby has lots of chance to practice and increase your milk supply. For this reason, we will only use the dummy during painful procedures, unless you state otherwise.

Problems associated with the habitual use of dummies when you go home:

- Early weaning from the breast
- Increased incidence of ear infections

How do I recognise when my baby is in pain?

Babies often show similar signs when they are both stressed and in pain, so it can sometimes be difficult to tell. Some signs of pain or stress are:

- Facial expressions including bulging brow, eyes squeezed tight shut, open lips or mouth stretched open, taut tongue
- Crying, irritability and being generally unsettled

What can I do to comfort my baby?

You can help your baby settle when he/she is stressed or in pain by:

- Changing your baby's position
- Positive touch and containment holding
- Skin to skin, if your baby is well enough
- Cuddling your baby closely or wrapping a cover snugly around him/her if they are well enough
- Putting your baby to the breast
- Offering a dummy
- Turning down the lights and speaking quietly to minimise noise and leaving baby alone to try and settle
- Telling staff if you are concerned – we are here to help!

What if my baby has longer-lasting pain?

If your baby has ongoing pain, paracetamol or something stronger may be prescribed by the doctors.

Can I refuse pain relief for my baby?

If you do not wish your baby to have pain relief, or have any questions, please feel free to discuss it with a member of the Special Care team.

References

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