

Parent Information Leaflet

Care of your Late Preterm Baby

Congratulations on the birth of your new baby. Your baby was born a little early at 35 to 36 weeks gestation. We call this 'late preterm'. This leaflet will cover some of the problems that 'late preterm' babies can have and how you can help your baby get off to a good start.

Hospital stay

While many babies born at 35 or 36 weeks can be cared for on the postnatal ward, around a half of 'late preterm' babies need to be admitted to the neonatal unit for help to regulate blood sugar levels and temperature and support with feeding. Some 'late preterm' babies have breathing difficulties lasting a few days after birth. All of these problems are more common in babies who are born early.

You should expect to stay in hospital with your baby for at least 72 hours but admission can be as long as 10 days or more.

Temperature

Your baby is smaller than a baby born at term and has less body fat. This means your baby will lose heat more easily. If your baby becomes cold, this can affect the blood sugar and breathing rate.

Your baby will have regular checks of temperature after birth.

When holding your baby skin-to-skin, remember your baby needs to wear a woollen hat and should be covered with a blanket, away from draughts. When you are not holding your baby skin-to-skin they should be dressed in a vest, baby-gro, cardigan, hat, socks and mittens. If your baby is lying in a cot, they should also be under a blanket. Your midwife will show you how to assess your baby's temperature and give you advice about how warm to keep your home.

Feeding and weight loss

It is important that your baby starts feeding as soon as possible after delivery and then regularly every 2-3 hours. This is to ensure that baby's blood sugar levels stay normal. This will be checked by taking a small sample of blood from baby's heel on the first day of life.

If you choose to breastfeed, you will be supported by the midwives, nursery nurses and maternity care assistants on the ward. You might find your milk supply is delayed following preterm birth. If your baby does not attach or suck well following delivery, we will show you how to start milk expression to keep your milk supply up.

All newborn babies should be weighed at 72 hours of age and again on the day of discharge.

It is normal for your baby to lose weight in the first week, but if there is a large weight loss, the medical and nursing team will review your baby's wellness and feeding pattern. Most babies are able to take greater volumes of milk but some babies may need to be admitted to the neonatal unit for feeding via a tube until they are able to manage themselves.

Jaundice

Jaundice is a yellow colour in the skin caused by the build-up of a waste substance in the blood called bilirubin. It is a common newborn condition, particularly in 'late preterm' babies who cannot process bilirubin as easily in the liver.

Complications of a high bilirubin level are rare but can be damaging, so we will monitor your baby closely for jaundice. If your baby looks jaundiced, the level of bilirubin will be measured either by a simple device called a bilirubinometer, or by a blood sample taken from the heel. Your baby may need phototherapy (blue light) treatment for a few days to help your baby break down bilirubin.

You will be given a leaflet about jaundice if your baby needs treatment or before you are discharged.

Discharge

Your baby will be discharged once feeds are going well, the blood sugar and temperature are stable and weight checks are satisfactory. You will be involved in this decision with your baby's medical and nursing team.

A community midwife should visit you and your baby within 24 hours of discharge. If you have any concerns about feeding or jaundice, you should contact your community midwife or GP for advice.