



Information Sheet

Assessing your baby's breathing



Your baby's sleep can be deep and still, active, noisy and snuffly, all in one night. Your comfort level will grow with experience and you'll gradually feel more confident. You will find that you will be checking on your baby less and less as your baby grows older. This leaflet has been written to give you a brief guide on how to assess your baby's breathing, and what to do if you are concerned.

Assessing your baby's breathing

- **Breathing cycle**

Your newborn breathes in cycles, with breaths getting progressively faster and deeper, then slower and shallower. Your baby may have pauses in their breathing for up to five seconds then start up again with deepening breaths. This is normal. Their breathing should not stop for longer than 10 seconds at a time.

- **Breathing rate**

Undress your baby and watch their chest movement. Babies under the age of one year normally breathe at a rate of 25-45 breaths per minute. If they were born prematurely, this could be up to 60 per minute. A baby's breathing rate may be different when they are asleep, awake or feeding. Activity will usually reflect an increase in breathing rate.

- **Chest movement**

Be familiar with the way your baby's chest moves when they breathe. There may be a degree of recession (in-drawing between the ribs) even when they are well. However, if this gets worse, this indicates that your baby is working hard to breathe.

- **Colour change**

A change in your baby's colour is a strong indication that your baby is unwell. If your baby's lips are getting blue or if they look pale, that is a sign they are not getting enough oxygen into their body.

- **Noisy breathing**

Babies often make all sorts of noises most of which are completely normal. Listen for grunting sounds or wheezing. When a baby has trouble getting air in their lungs, they make a grunting sound.

- **Nasal flaring**

Watch your baby's nose for nasal flaring. When a baby is in respiratory distress, their nostrils will widen when they inhale. This is because they are having trouble getting enough air into their lungs.

- **Changes in behaviour**

Assess your baby's energy level. A baby who is having respiratory distress gets tired from working hard to breathe and appears lethargic or limp. As breathing becomes more difficult, your baby may not be able to take the usual amount of milk by breast or bottle or may be sick after feeding and become irritable. Changes in feeding, sleeping or behaviour may all be signs that your baby is unwell.

Always trust your instincts. You know your baby best.

What to do if you are worried about your baby

If you are worried about your baby's breathing, do not hesitate to seek advice.

If you need help urgently, call **999**.

If not as urgent, you can either:

- Call the Neonatal Community Outreach Nurses and ask for a home visit, or
- Make an appointment with your GP.