

Necrotizing Enterocolitis

What is necrotizing enterocolitis?

Necrotizing enterocolitis is an inflammation that hurts the bowel. It is also called NEC. NEC may be caused by:

- prematurity
- infection from viruses or bacteria

NEC occurs more often in premature than full-term babies.

How do you know my baby has NEC?

Some of the signs of NEC are:

- your baby does not tolerate feedings
- your baby has vomiting
- your baby's stomach is very full and tender to touch
- your baby's abdomen has a red or blue colour
- blood in the stool or diarrhea

Sometimes there are other changes in the baby's condition, such as:

- your baby is very sleepy
- your body temperature changes often
- pauses in breathing, called apnea
- a slow heart rate called bradycardia
- your baby's colour becomes blue

Tests for NEC include:

- x-rays of the baby's abdomen
- testing the baby's stools for blood

Will my baby have pain?

Your baby may have some pain. You can help your baby feel more comfortable by:

- putting your baby in a comfortable position
- handling your baby gently
- talking quietly to your baby

If your baby's condition is stable, you may be able to hold and cuddle your baby. Check with your baby's nurse about when you can hold your baby. If your baby appears to be in pain, he or she may be given pain medication.

How is my baby fed?

Your baby cannot eat for 7 to 10 days or more. This allows your baby's bowel to heal. During this time your baby will be fed through the intravenous tube. The fluid in the intravenous gives your baby all the nutrients of sugar, protein, vitamins and fat your baby needs. This is called Total Parental Nutrition or TPN.

What can be done to help my baby get better?

Your baby's caregivers will take these actions to help your baby:

- Regularly check your baby's heart rate, blood pressure and breathing.
- Place a tube through your baby's nose, down into the stomach. This tube drains fluid and air from your baby's stomach.
- Give your baby fluids, nutrition and antibiotics through the intravenous tube. Antibiotics help your baby to fight the infection.
- Help your baby breathe, when needed.
- Give your baby pain medication, when needed.
- Give your baby a blood transfusion, if needed.

Is NEC serious?

Most babies with NEC make a complete recovery. As they grow up, there is no sign that they had this problem.

However, NEC can become serious if not treated early. If the NEC becomes very serious, the baby's bowels may stop working. NEC may cause infection in the bloodstream. It can also damage the tissues of the bowel and make small holes in the bowel wall. This is called bowel perforation. Surgery will be necessary for a bowel perforation and sometimes the damaged bowel will need to be removed.

It is possible that strictures or narrowing of the bowel can remain after the baby has recovered from NEC and this may also require surgery.

**If you have questions about NEC or your baby's health,
please talk to your baby's caregivers.**