

Newborn Hypoglycemia

What is Newborn Hypoglycemia?

Hypoglycemia happens when your baby's blood glucose (sugar) is too low. Glucose is needed to help your baby's muscles, organs, and brain function properly. If your baby's glucose is too low or stays too low for a long time, his or her health may be affected.

In most cases, a baby's blood glucose level can quickly go back to normal with treatment and close monitoring.

What are the Risk Factors for Hypoglycemia?

A baby is more likely to have hypoglycemia if he or she has one or more of the following risk factors:

- larger or smaller than normal for his or her age
- mother has diabetes (type I, type 2, gestational)
- born early (premature)
- has an infection after birth
- needs oxygen after birth
- cold after birth
- not feeding well
- born with a condition known to cause low blood glucose such as liver disease or a genetic condition.

What are the Symptoms of Hypoglycemia?

Your baby's blood glucose will be checked if he or she has any of these symptoms:

- shakiness, tremors, twitching or jitteriness
- breathing problems
- low muscle tone (your baby appears to be floppy)
- vomiting (throwing up) or poor feeding
- unstable body temperature
- bluish color or pale skin
- high pitched cry.

How is Hypoglycemia Diagnosed?

Hypoglycemia is diagnosed by taking a sample of blood from your baby. This test will be done often until your baby's blood glucose level reaches a normal range.

If your baby has any risk factors for hypoglycemia, a nurse will check his or her blood glucose level even if there are no symptoms.

How Can Hypoglycemia Be Prevented?

After your baby is born, he or she needs to adjust to life outside of the uterus. To help prevent hypoglycemia you can try the following right after birth:

- keep your baby warm
- hold your baby skin-to-skin
- feed your baby.

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How is Hypoglycemia Treated?

The type of treatment will depend on how low your baby's blood glucose level is and how well he or she is feeding.

In some cases, frequent feeding is enough to increase blood glucose levels. In other cases, your baby may be given:

- extra expressed breastmilk
- a glucose gel that is placed in his or her mouth
- formula
- banked human milk (by request).

If your baby's blood glucose level is very low or does not improve after feeding, glucose may need to be given through an intravenous (IV) line. Your baby may need to be cared for in a special care unit or NICU (neonatal intensive care unit).

Your baby's blood glucose level will continue to be tested until it reaches a normal range and your baby is feeding well. If your baby has trouble reaching or maintaining normal levels, your baby's doctor may contact a specialist to see if your baby needs any additional tests or treatments.

Can You Breastfeed if Your Baby has Hypoglycemia?

Yes. When your baby has low blood glucose levels, it does not mean there is anything wrong with your breastmilk. Breastfeeding early and often helps your baby maintain normal blood glucose levels.

If your baby is not feeding well or is unwell, it is important for you to express or pump breastmilk. This can be given to your baby until your baby is ready to breastfeed.