

# Probiotics for premature babies

## Information for patients, relatives and carers

### Introduction

This leaflet provides information for the parents of babies born prematurely about the use of probiotics treatment.

### What are probiotics?

Probiotics are harmless bacteria that live in our gut and help to keep it healthy. Probiotics can stop harmful bacteria colonising the gut and can help to prevent conditions such as necrotising enterocolitis (NEC), a life-threatening condition that mostly occurs in premature infants between 2-8 weeks of age. NEC causes inflammation in the gut that can lead to intestinal tissue damage requiring surgery or even death.

Probiotics is a supplement that contains friendly bacteria that would usually be found in the intestine of breast-fed babies who were born at term (at 37 weeks or more). There are different types (strains) of probiotics, with some more effective than others. In our unit we use the Proprems® product which has been shown to be beneficial in the Proprems trial of preterm babies.

### What are the benefits of probiotics?

Preterm babies cared for in hospital frequently have unusual bacteria in their intestines, often as a result of other treatments we use, such as antibiotics. These unusual bacteria can increase the risk of serious complications such as NEC or infection. Both probiotics and colostrum (your first milk) support the development of your baby's healthy gut with normal bacteria.

There is good evidence from research that probiotics can reduce NEC by 30 percent and improve babies' ability to tolerate milk feeds.

### How are probiotics given to babies?

The product is given with milk feeds (either breastmilk or formula) daily until the baby reaches 34 weeks corrected age. (Corrected age is your premature baby's chronological age minus the number of weeks or months early they were born.)

The probiotic may be stopped if there are difficulties with tolerating milk feeds.

### What are the side effects?

Research has not identified any specific side effects. There are no known risks or side effects of taking probiotics. If you would like further information on the probiotics your baby is receiving, please speak to the doctor/nurse looking after your baby.

## How do I make a comment about my baby's care?

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We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at **imperial.pals@nhs.net** The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department  
Fourth floor  
Salton House  
St Mary's Hospital  
Praed Street  
London W2 1NY

Email: **ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net**

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

## Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team: **imperial.patient.information@nhs.net**

## Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: [www.imperial.nhs.uk](http://www.imperial.nhs.uk)

Date published June 2023  
Date for review June 2026  
Reference no 5181  
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