

Probiotics for premature babies

Information for parents and carers

Introduction

This leaflet provides information for the parents of babies born prematurely about the use of regular 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 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 born at term (at 37 weeks). 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 per cent and improve babies' ability to tolerate milk feeds.

How are probiotics given to babies?

The product is given once a day (one sachet mixed in water) prior to a milk feed daily until the baby reaches 34 weeks corrected age. It 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 give feedback?

We want to hear your **suggestions** or **comments**. Your feedback helps us provide the best service. You can always speak to a member of staff.

You can also contact the **patient advice and liaison service (PALS)** on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 to 16.00, Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays) or email at imperial.pals@nhs.net. The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or questions and they can help solve problems.

You can make a complaint by ringing **020 3312 1337 / 1349** or emailing ICHCT.Complaints@nhs.net. The address is Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY.

Other ways to read this leaflet

Please email us at imperial.communications@nhs.net if you need this leaflet in a different format. This could be large print, Easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in a different language.

Neonatal intensive care unit

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