

# Neonatal stroke

**This leaflet gives information for families who have been told their baby has had a stroke around the time of birth. It answers some commonly asked questions and provides an overview of neonatal stroke.**

## What is a stroke?

A stroke happens when blood supply to part of the brain stops. There are two main types of stroke. Ischaemic strokes are caused by a blockage in the blood supply to the brain, haemorrhagic strokes occur when blood leaks from a burst blood vessel into the brain. It can be difficult to identify the symptoms of stroke in babies – they may appear generally unwell, have seizures, or appear drowsy.

## Why do babies have strokes?

The causes of stroke in babies are very different to those in adults. The stroke may be related to:

- clots breaking off from the placenta during the birth process, and travelling to the child's brain
- a blood clotting disorder that the mother or baby may have
- an underlying medical condition like a heart problem or sickle cell disease which has an impact on how effectively blood is supplied to the brain
- an underlying abnormality in the vessels taking blood to or from the brain
- an infection or illness in the mother or baby around the time of birth.

It may not be possible to identify the specific cause of a stroke in all babies, and it may be the result of several factors happening at once.

## What tests will my child have?

Some tests may be recommended to help understand the possible cause of your baby's

stroke, and to see if further treatment is necessary. Not all babies will need to have all of these tests, which may include:

- MRI (brain scan)
- heart scan
- blood tests
- EEG (a test to record the electrical activity of your child's brain).

Some of these tests may need to be repeated as the baby grows and develops. Some tests may take some time to be completed (for example blood tests for possible genetic causes). Some tests may also be done on the parents.

## **What does this mean for my child's development?**

When a stroke happens, and blood supply to part of the brain stops, there may be injury and damage. Different parts of the brain have different functions, so the consequences of a baby's stroke will vary. Some babies recover fully after a stroke, while others may have difficulties with movement, communication, thinking and learning skills, and be at risk of epilepsy. It can take time for the full impact of a stroke to become clear.

The doctors who have looked at your baby's brain scan may be able to give you some indication of how their development will be affected. It is important to have continued access to medical and therapy assessment and advice as your child develops, so any potential difficulties can be identified and treated.

## What can I do to support my child's recovery?

Your child will be assessed while they are still in hospital by the therapy team. We will contact the child development services in your area. It is important that you have the opportunity for review with a doctor and therapy team. They will monitor your baby's development and provide advice. If your baby needs further help this will be arranged by your local team. You may also be seen by the hospital neonatal stroke team in clinic here at Evelina London.

Below are some general tips to support your baby's development.

- Encourage your baby to look at you, and practice getting them to follow your face or a toy.
- Encourage your baby to reach for and explore toys with both hands.
- Encourage your baby to look to both sides – you can do this by placing interesting toys or pictures on either side of their cot, and by making sure you approach them and speak/sing to them from different sides.
- Make sure your baby experiences play in a variety of positions including time on their back, both sides, and tummy time (your baby should always sleep on their back).

## What questions should we ask before we go home?

It can be helpful to ask the doctors, nurses and therapists looking after your baby the following questions.

- Will we have a copy of a discharge summary, and does this go to our GP and health visitor?
- Will we have a list of medications our baby is taking, and information about how to get more if we need to?
- Which teams has our baby been referred to for follow-up and review? Can we have their details and phone numbers if we need to contact them?
- What should we do if we become concerned our baby is having a seizure, showing signs of further stroke, or becoming unwell?

## Useful sources of information

**Bliss** – supports families with premature or sick babies, **w:** [www.bliss.org.uk](http://www.bliss.org.uk)

**Cerebra** – charity that offers help and information for families with children with brain conditions **w:** [w3.cerebra.org.uk](http://w3.cerebra.org.uk)

**Contact** – provides information and advice for families with disabled children, **w:** [www.contact.org.uk](http://www.contact.org.uk)

**Stroke Association** – support service and resources around childhood stroke, **w:** [www.stroke.org.uk/childhood](http://www.stroke.org.uk/childhood)

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns for the team, please contact us on **t:** 020 7188 4648 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm). For questions about your appointment, please contact our appointments team via email, **e:** PaediatricAppointmentsNeurology@gstt.nhs.uk

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit

**w:** [www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets)

## Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am-5pm

**e:** [letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk)

## Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS)

**e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)

**e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

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