



Reducing the risk of bleeding in the brain in premature babies.



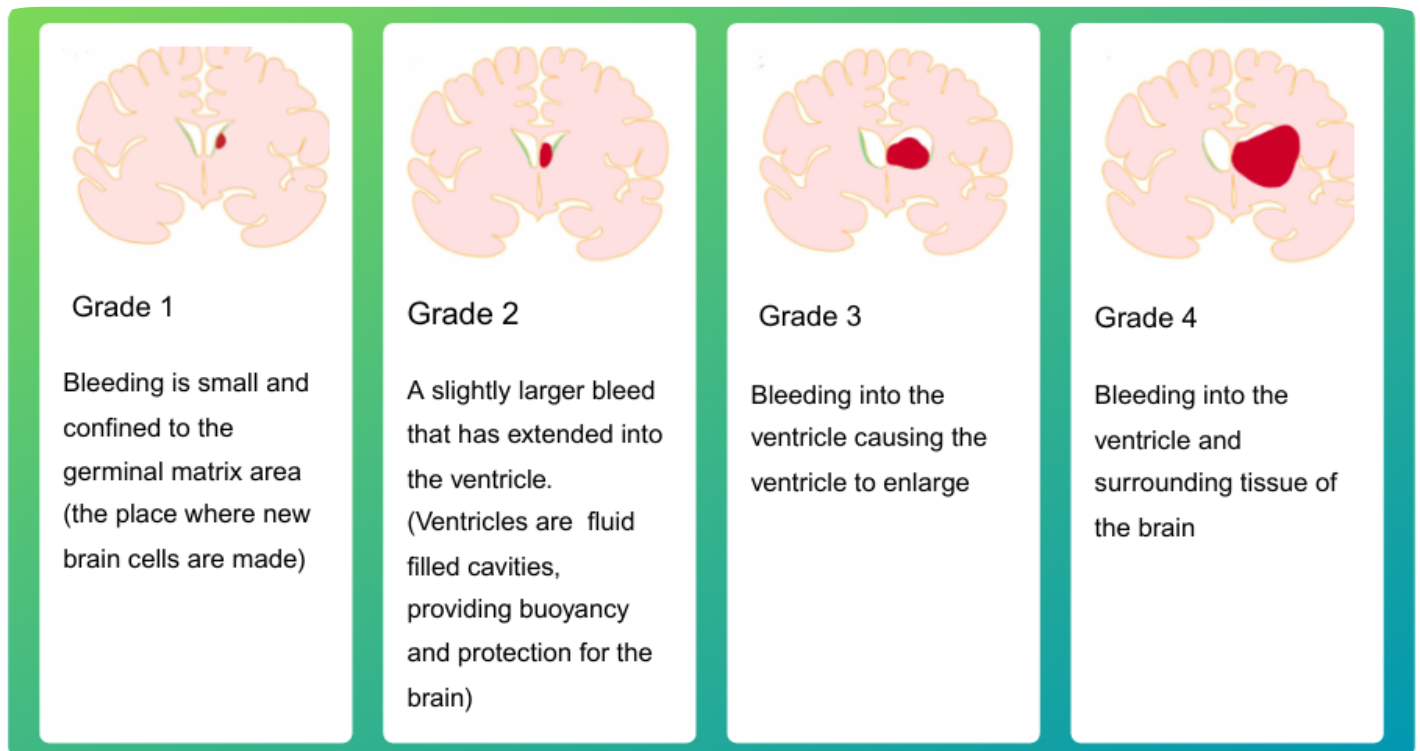
Why should you read this leaflet

Babies born prematurely have delicate, developing brains, which makes them more vulnerable to bleeding inside the brain known as Intraventricular Haemorrhage (IVH). The risk is highest in babies born before 30 weeks of pregnancy, but it can still affect babies born between 30 and 32 weeks, and occasionally those born later. We know quick handling or rapid position changes can increase the flow of blood to and from the brain, increasing the likelihood of a bleed.

This leaflet explains what measures the maternity team may have been able to provide to you before delivery, if there was sufficient warning you had gone into preterm labour. Then how you and the neonatal team can work together during the first few days of your baby's life to help protect their brain

What is IVH?

This means there has been a bleed into or around the ventricles of brain (areas/structures that are like chambers filled with clear fluid), caused by the fragile blood vessels leaking into the surrounding tissue. There are 4 grades of IVH, based on the size and location of the bleed.



Before Birth – How We Prepare

If your baby is expected to be born early, there are several treatments and interventions that can be offered before birth to help support their health and reduce the risks

Born in the right Hospital



Babies born extremely early do best when born in hospitals with specialist neonatal care. If there's time, you may be transferred to a hospital with a Neonatal Intensive Care unit (NICU) before your baby is born.

Magnesium Sulphate (MgSO₄)



You may be given this medication if you are in preterm labour. This medication protects your baby's brain and reduces the risk of cerebral palsy. (Cerebral palsy is a physical condition that affects movement, posture and co-ordination.)

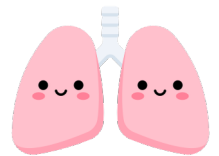
Antibiotics (if infection is suspected)

If there are signs of infection or your waters have been broken for some time, antibiotics may be given to you to protect both you and your baby.



Steroids

You may be given steroid injections to help your baby's lungs and brain develop. These work best if your baby is born 1–7 days after the course is completed.



Delayed Cord Clamping



If your baby is stable at birth, the teams will wait about 60 seconds before clamping the umbilical cord. This helps increase your baby's blood volume and supports blood pressure and brain protection.

After Birth

Keeping Baby Warm

Tiny babies lose heat very quickly. Your baby will be placed in a special plastic wrap and hat to keep them warm. Their temperature will be checked often to avoid both getting too cold or too hot.

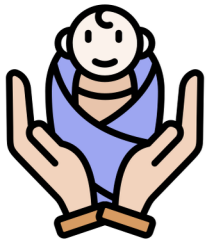


Breathing Support

Some babies will need help with their breathing using a breathing tube (ventilation), while others may breathe for themselves but need gentle support (such as CPAP). The team will decide what kind of support is needed for your baby. Oxygen levels are closely monitored; too much or too little oxygen can increase the risk of IVH.



Gentle Handling



Every movement matters, rapid or extreme movements (lifting the lower limbs above the head) can affect the blood flow to the brain. Containment holding and gentle movement is not harmful to your baby. Nurses and doctors will handle your baby slowly and carefully to avoid sudden changes in blood flow to the brain. We try to support your baby to have as much rest as possible and make cares such as nappy changes and blood tests less stressful. You can help your baby by learning how they communicate with you through their behaviour (body language telling you what they like and need) and the handling approaches that help them to stay calm.

Performing side lying nappy changes is much less stressful for your baby. Staff will support you to do this. You can help by keeping voices soft and movements calm during cares or nappy changes.

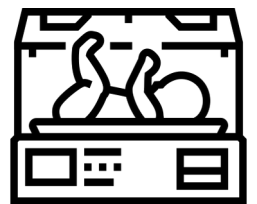
Holding your Baby



Close, nurturing contact with your baby offers many benefits, including enhanced breast milk production, stronger bonding, and improved emotional well-being for both parent and baby, among many others. If your baby is stable, the team will support a “delivery room cuddle” before taking your baby to the neonatal unit. On the unit, we will regularly assess whether your baby is well enough for skin-to-skin contact and will support you to do this as soon as possible. We will help position your baby safely, keeping their head supported.

Positioning your baby

Your baby's head will be kept slightly elevated, and the team will ensure their head, shoulders, and hips are aligned in a straight line. This helps support healthy blood flow to and from your baby's brain.



Feeding and Nutrition

Breast milk (including expressed colostrum) is the best food for brain and immune development. If you can't express milk right away, donor milk may be used if available and with your consent. Your baby may also need extra nutrition through an Intravenous line while feeds are increased slowly.



Vitamin K

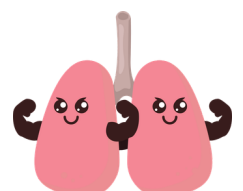


Your baby will receive vitamin K soon after birth to prevent bleeding problems. An injection into the thigh (intramuscular) provides the most effective protection for preterm babies.

Caffeine



Caffeine is often given in the first few hours after birth to help your baby breathe steadily and protect their brain.



Ongoing Care and Monitoring

Looking at your baby's brain



An ultrasound scan is done to see your baby's brain in the first few days to look for signs of bleeding. This is called a cranial ultrasound. This will be performed at the baby's cot side.

Looking out for infection and pain

The care team will continue to watch your baby closely for signs of infection, pain, or distress, all of which can affect brain health.

Pain relief and comfort measures (such as comfort holding, swaddling, or sucking on a dummy) are used to keep your baby calm and comfortable.



If a bleed occurs



If your baby does have a bleed, your medical team will explain what this may mean for your baby's future development. Your baby will still have follow up appointments to monitor their development even if there is no bleeding.



We Are Here to Support You



Having a premature baby can feel overwhelming, and it's understandable to have lots of questions and concerns. The neonatal team is here to support you every step of the way on your journey together.

Please feel free to ask us any questions at any time.

Here are four websites with helpful information and ideas to support your baby's development. Simply scan the QR code or click on the picture to visit each website.

