

If you have any questions, please ask the Child Life Specialist.

NICU: Easing Baby's Pain

At times, your baby may have pain while they are in the hospital. The care team will provide as much relief for your baby's pain as possible. There are several ways you can help to ease your baby's pain, as well. But, you should always ask baby's care team about the best way you can help before trying to do so. Below are some ways to ease baby's pain, depending on your baby's needs and medical status.

Calming Baby

During the first 3 months of life, infants need to be comforted in a way that mimics the calming sense they had before birth in the womb. This is sometimes called "the missing 4th trimester." Based on this idea, Dr. Harvey Karp designed "The 5 S's for Soothing Baby."

Swaddle

Wrapping your baby snugly will help them feel secure and contained. You can help your baby to remain swaddled during procedures, only untucking the arm or leg needed. Work with staff to learn to swaddle your baby properly. Swaddle your baby's hands up near their face so that they can also sooth themselves. But, baby should not be swaddled all day, just during fussing and sleep.

"Shhh"

The sound that shushing or "white noise" makes can be very soothing to babies. It sounds much like the inside of their mother's womb. While shushing close to baby's ear, it is important to match the loudness of your "shhh" to the loudness of your baby's cry. As baby becomes quieter, so should your "shhh." Shushing works best when only one person is making the noise. This prevents too much stimulation for baby.

Side/Stomach

You should always lay baby on their backs for safe sleep. But, rolling your baby onto their side or stomach can help calm them. Holding baby on their side, stomach or over your shoulder also lessens the startle reflex.

Swaying

Swaying motion will help soothe and comfort your baby as this reminds them of the gentle movement they had while in their mother's womb. Support your infant's head and neck. Then, gently sway your baby 1 to 2 inches back and forth. Be gentle not to sway or shake your baby hard.

Sucking

Sucking can decrease baby's stress and may ease mild pain. You may offer your baby a pacifier, bottle or breast to prompt sucking. But, ask your baby's care team if your baby is ready for this step before trying it.

Keep in mind that each baby is unique and has specific needs, so be sure to follow your baby's lead and meet your baby where they are. For example, if your baby is very upset and screaming you may want to "shhh" loudly and sway quickly. Then as your baby becomes less upset and fussy, you can "shhh" quietly and only sway slightly.

Always watch for signs of too much stimulation for baby. This may appear as:

- Skin color changes from normal to pale or bright red
- Hiccupping
- Changes in breathing rate from slow and regular to fast and choppy
- Restlessness, jerking movements

These may be signs that your baby needs less noise and activity.

Kangaroo Care

Kangaroo care is when a parent holds their baby skin to skin. This contact helps to soothe your baby and keep baby's body temperature, heart rate and breathing normal. This may help during procedures such as heel sticks. It may be possible for you to provide kangaroo care and hold your baby in their tucked position while the stick is done. Providing this support can help your infant cope with pain. This is an excellent way to calm your baby while building the bond between you.

TooSweet® (or Oral Sucrose)

TooSweet is a form of oral sucrose (sugar water). It has been shown to ease pain for babies in the NICU older than 27 weeks gestational age. TooSweet can be given to your baby 2 minutes before the start of a procedure, by placing the TooSweet on the end of a pacifier, tip of a gloved finger or directly onto your baby's tongue. During the procedure, more TooSweet can be given every 30 to 45 seconds or as needed.

For more information on pain management support, please contact your Child Life Specialist at 312.472.3201.

Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at hlc@nm.org, or by calling 312.926.5465. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363 or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

Developed by: NMH Neonatal Intensive Care Unit