Sucrose

as pain relief for babies
on the Trevor Mann Baby Unit
and Special Care Baby Unit

A Parent Information Leaflet
Do babies experience pain?

While your baby is here on the Trevor Mann Baby Unit / Special Care Baby Unit, it may be necessary for us to undertake various procedures, such as taking blood samples and putting in drips (cannulas). Research has shown that even premature babies are capable of experiencing pain. Therefore, we aim, as far as possible, to minimise any potential discomfort.

What can be done to reduce any pain my baby might feel?

For some procedures, medicines may be given to reduce pain. But at times, it may be inappropriate or not possible for us to do so. This may be because of your baby’s age or condition so we look to other measures which can also play an important role in reducing pain or distress.

These may include containment holding (with still hands cupped around your baby’s head and across their hips or bottom, as shown in the picture), cuddling, breast-feeding and allowing your baby to suck (on a finger, pacifier or teat) either during or after the procedure.

If you are present on the Unit and wish to remain with your baby during the procedure, our doctors and nurses may advise you how you can help to comfort your baby in these ways. Alternatively, one of the nurses or doctors may do this on your behalf.

How can sucrose help to relieve pain?

In addition to these measures, several pieces of research have also identified that dropping liquid sucrose (a sweet tasting solution) onto the tongue may also help to reduce crying and other signs of pain in babies. It is widely used in America and many special care baby units
in the United Kingdom are now using sucrose to reduce discomfort during procedures. It is believed that tasting this sweet solution produces a natural release of the body’s own painkillers. We know that putting the sweet solution down a baby’s feeding tube does not have the same effect and so the solution needs to be placed onto the front part of the baby’s tongue, where most of their taste receptors are located. We are able to give sucrose instead of other stronger painkillers, for some minor procedures.

**Does sucrose pose any risk to my baby?**

Sucrose is considered to be safe and effective for reducing pain from a single painful event. However, much of the research that has been done so far has not looked at the long-term effects of sucrose use. More research is needed into the effect of repeated doses of sucrose, especially for very low birthweight or ventilated babies. We do know, however, that research has found that giving sucrose to babies decreases their crying time and other signs of pain such as certain facial action. (Cochrane Library 2006)

**Are there any side effects to this treatment?**

Any side effects of this treatment are unknown but sucrose cannot cause decay to teeth that have not yet appeared.

**Who decides whether my baby will receive sucrose?**

Together, you and the team of doctors and nurses caring for your baby can decide whether it is appropriate for your baby to receive sucrose prior to a procedure. Please tell us if you would prefer that sucrose was not given to your baby.

**How much sucrose will my baby be given?**

Between 0.2ml – 2ml of sucrose solution will be put onto your baby’s tongue by syringe. This is usually done about two minutes before the procedure and can be repeated.
If you have any further questions, please ask one of the nurses or doctors on the Unit:

**Telephone:**

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