

Taste and Smell

Information for parents, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

Special Care Baby Unit, York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York YO31 8HE
Direct Line: 01904 726005

Or

Special Care Baby Unit, Scarborough Hospital
Woodlands Drive, Scarborough, North Yorkshire, YO12 6QL
Direct Line: 01723 342125

Babies taste and smell

Babies cared for on the neonatal unit can miss out on the positive taste and smell experiences that the healthy full term baby will experience. If your baby is born early, they will also have missed some time in the womb, tasting and swallowing amniotic fluid - experiencing, different tastes as their mother eats different food.

These experiences are important in their development, helping them to;

- recognise their parents
- enjoy a range of tastes and smells
- encourage a sense of pleasure in eating and drinking.

Babies cared for on the Neonatal Unit often experience unpleasant smells and tastes, from medicines, disinfectants and cleaning solutions, which they appear not to enjoy.

These unpleasant experiences have been found to make some babies breathe less, hold their breath or change their heart rate.

Where possible we try to reduce these unpleasant experiences and enable positive tastes and smells in their place.

You can help your baby learn about and enjoy their sense of taste and smell

Enjoying taste and smell

- Give your baby mouth care to freshen their mouth using milk so they enjoy a positive taste.
- Ask your baby's nurse to show you how to do mouth care. They can also give you a written information leaflet explaining what to do and why.
- If you are able to express your colostrum or breast milk to use for mouth care, the baby can also benefit from its many special health properties.
- Your baby may gain comfort from your smell, and will learn to recognise your smell, if you leave your odour next to your baby using a muslin cloth, or special cloth doll/ toy.
- Whatever item you choose to leave with the baby should be washed at 60°C before use to kill any germs.
 - Ensure you have clean skin, ideally without unnatural smells such as perfume, aftershave or cigarette smoke.
 - Tuck the cloth in your clothing, against your skin, for at least half an hour, ideally overnight.
 - Mums may want to place the cloth between their breasts, but should make sure it does not actually get breast milk on it.
 - The cloth (or toy/ doll) can then be placed near your baby's nose and mouth- ensuring they have space to breathe.
 - If you use a muslin cloth the baby can be laid on the cloth, have it tucked over them like a blanket or used to line the nest that they lie in.
 - The cloth needs to be washed regularly to be certain it is clean and hygienic. Many parents will have more than one cloth and rotate them, so the cloth is always clean and their scent fresh.

Avoiding less enjoyable tastes and smells

- When you rub alcohol gel onto your hands to clean them, wait 30 seconds for it to dry before touching your baby or putting your hands into the incubator. This allows the alcohol to evaporate, reducing the unpleasant smell.
- Avoid using scented body lotion, perfume or after shave whilst spending time with your baby in hospital. The strong smells are not enjoyed by early or sick babies and will mask your natural smell.
- Avoid using a vanilla scented pacifier for your baby. Its scent may mask other enjoyable smells such as your natural smell, or the smell of breast milk.
- When nurses and doctors use medical products near your baby, such as alcohol wipes, they should wait at least 30 seconds after opening the wipe, before putting them near your baby, to allow the worst of the smell to evaporate.

Cigarette smoke

- Babies are aware of cigarette smoke on people's skin and/or clothing and do not enjoy the smell or taste of it.
- Smoke residue in clothing or on someone's skin can cause irritation to a baby's eyes or nasal passages.
- Babies will be exposed to this cigarette smoke when a smoker, touches cuddles or does kangaroo care with a baby after smoking.
- E-cigarettes are felt to be less harmful to babies, but still -contain chemicals such as nicotine and propylene glycol which a baby can be exposed to.
- People who smoke and who will be in contact with your baby are advised to;
 - Wear a jumper/shirt/jacket to smoke in, and then remove this before entering the nursery in the Neonatal Unit.
 - Wash their hands after smoking and before touching the baby.
 - Consider delaying cuddles and kangaroo care until an hour after they have smoked, especially if the baby will be in direct contact with the smoke exposed clothing.
 - If someone who smokes is bringing in clothes or bedding for the baby, try to ensure the items are washed first and dried in a smoke free environment.

If you or someone you know would like to give up smoking you can be given information, advice and support to do this. Please ask your baby's nurse, midwife or doctor for more information or go to **www.nhs.uk/smokefree**

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact: Special Care Baby Unit, c/o Policy and Patient Information Team, York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, 98 Union Terrace, York, YO31 7ES, telephone 01904 721045 or 725230 or email us at patient.information2@york.nhs.uk.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk. An answer phone is available out of hours.

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Telephone: 01904 725566

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Adapted from the booklet by:

Thames Valley & Wessex Neonatal Developmental Care Leads Group

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