

Neonatal Hypoglycemia

As a baby transitions from life inside their mother into the outside world, several different processes within the baby's body are changing quickly. One important process is the baby's body learns to keep its blood sugar stable. Sugar (sometimes called glucose) is used to provide energy for the baby, especially for the baby's brain. It is considered to be normal for some babies to have lower blood sugars for the first 48 hours after birth. If low blood sugars continue for longer than 48 hours, this could be a sign of an abnormality.

What babies are at higher risk for developing low blood sugars?

Certain features may put a baby at higher risk for having low blood sugars. These features include babies who are born early (earlier than 37 weeks gestation), have poor growth during pregnancy, are very big when they are born, or have moms with diabetes. Additionally, if the baby's body is very stressed due to a difficult delivery or health problems in their mother, they also may be at higher risk for developing low blood sugars.

What else can cause a low blood sugar in a baby?

In rare cases, babies can have a disorder in the way they make or store carbohydrates (carbohydrates are another word for sugar), fat and protein. Certain hormone deficiencies like low cortisol or low growth hormone levels can also cause babies to have low blood sugar. If the baby has a severe infection, blood sugars can run low. Finally, babies can have a disorder in which they make too much insulin leading to low blood sugars.

What are signs of low blood sugar in a baby?

It can often be difficult to tell if a blood sugar is low in a baby. Some signs that may suggest a low blood sugar include: shakiness, poor feeding, breathing fast or pauses in breathing, irritability, sweating, excessive sleepiness, weak muscles, low body temperature or seizures.

When should a baby have their blood sugar checked?

Most newborn nurseries and NICUs (neonatal intensive care units) have protocols in place to determine if a baby's blood sugar needs to be checked. This is often determined by the baby's gestational age, weight and if the mother has diabetes. The baby's blood sugar may need to be checked if they are showing signs of low blood sugar that were discussed in the previous paragraph. A baby's blood sugar can be checked using a small amount of blood drawn from an IV (a small tube that goes into the vein) or a heel stick.

How is a low blood sugar treated in a baby?

Generally, babies are fed breast milk or formula to help bring the blood sugar up. If the baby is unable to drink safely, a specialized form of sugar water is given to the baby through an IV.