Hypoglycemia in the Newborn

Hypoglycemia is a condition that occurs when the blood sugar (glucose) is too low. Your baby’s blood glucose goal is 40 or above from birth to four hours of age, and 45 or above after four hours of age. Some babies are at greater risk of becoming hypoglycemic, and are routinely checked as precaution. They have conditions that include, but are not limited to: late preterm birth (less than 37 weeks), being greater than the 90th percentile or smaller than the 10th percentile based on their due date, having a diabetic mother, stress or sick babies.

What are the sign of hypoglycemia?

- Tremors, jitteriness, irritability
- Exaggerated Moro (startle) reflex
- High pitched cry
- Lethargy, listlessness, (poor muscle tone)
- Poor color, fast heart rate, slow/shallow breaths
- Poor suck, refusal to feed

What is the treatment for hypoglycemia?

If your baby has a low blood glucose it is necessary for the baby to eat. If the baby is cold (hypothermia) or the blood glucose is very low the baby may be placed under a warmer in the nursery to help warm the him or her. Additionally, some babies need to go to the NICU for IV dextrose if we are unable to treat the low blood glucose with feedings.

I will be breastfeeding my baby. Is this still possible with low blood glucose?

Many babies are able to breast-feed to increase their blood glucose, but this is not possible all the time. Some of the reasons your baby may not be able to go to breast include if the baby is receiving oxygen, if the baby has a low temperature, and/or if the baby is sleepy/unwilling to eat at the time. We will respect your wishes and will use formula/bottles only if needed. One example is if your baby has tried to breast-feed and the blood glucose did not rise adequately. Please know that if a bottle is given it is necessary so your baby can receive nutrition as quickly as possible.

My baby’s blood glucose is stable; now what?

We must have two tests above goal (40 or higher from birth to four hours and 45 or higher after four hours of age) before we go to an as needed basis for babies who are not high risk. High-risk babies are routinely checked before feedings for the first 12-24 hours. Breast-fed babies need to feed every 2-3 hours, and formula fed infants need to be fed every 3-4 hours. If your baby has had low blood glucose we encourage frequent feedings and to keep your baby skin to skin or swaddled in blankets for at least the first 24 hours with exception of feedings, diaper changes and bathing.

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