

LOW BIRTH WEIGHT BABIES

When there are challenges requiring admission to the Special Care Nursery

Low birth weight (LBW) is when a baby is born weighing less than 5 pounds 8 ounces, or 2500 grams. About 1 in every 12 babies in the United States is born with LBW. While most LBW babies are healthy, they are at increased risk for certain problems that require evaluation, monitoring, or treatment in our Special Care Nursery. For that reason, all babies born at less than 2500 grams come to our Special Care Nursery for an initial assessment following delivery.

DEFINITIONS

Low Birth Weight: Less than 2500 grams or 5 pounds 8 ounces, regardless of gestational age.

Small for gestational age: Infants born with a weight less than expected for their gestational age, commonly defined as a weight below the 10th percentile. These infants may weigh more than 2500 grams, but weigh less than average for their gestational age.

The following conditions are monitored if your infant needs to be admitted to the Special Care Nursery due to size:

Hypothermia

Because babies born with LBW lack subcutaneous fat stores, they are at a higher risk for temperature instability, especially hypothermia (low temperature). When babies get cold, this can lead to problems with feeding, blood sugars, and breathing. Your baby's temperature will be monitored by our nursing staff, and if he or she requires a heat source, a radiant warmer (bed with a warming lamp overhead), or an incubator will be used.

Poor Feeding

Some babies that are LBW also have difficulty with nursing and bottling. They sometimes cannot take enough feeding volumes to help them grow and stay hydrated. This can lead to weight loss and/or dehydration. These infants may need extra support from our lactation specialist and skilled nurses in the Special Care Nursery.

Hypoglycemia

Some LBW babies have problems with low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) requiring supplements to maintain normal blood glucose levels. Normal blood sugar levels are important for normal brain development. When babies are LBW, they lack the glycogen stores (sugar stores) that are present in babies born at an average weight. Some babies who have low blood sugar temporarily require a nasogastric feeding tube (NG tube) to supplement until feedings improve. An NG tube is a skinny tube that slides from one nostril down into the stomach, and is secured by tape to the cheek. This allows nurses to provide additional feeding volumes of breast milk, banked breast milk (donor), or formula, through the tube while the infant continues to work on breast and/or bottle feeding. Sometimes NG feedings still aren't enough to maintain a normal blood sugar, or are not medically recommended, and a baby will require an intravenous (IV) line for fluids.

LOW BIRTH WEIGHT BABIES (CONT.)

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Every baby is unique and it is our goal to help you, as parents, learn how to help your baby successfully transition to home. The most important factor in caring for your newborn is comfort and confidence with providing your baby what is needed to grow and thrive. We will work together to ensure that you feel prepared to care for your baby at home.

If your baby requires admission to the Special Care Nursery, he or she will be cared for by a Neonatologist (specialist doctor who is an expert in caring for babies), in conjunction with Neonatal Nurse Practitioners (nurses with advanced training in caring for newborns), and nurses who are specialized in caring for newborns. At the time of discharge, we will notify your primary care doctor and transfer care to your outpatient clinic.