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DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN[®]

Section on Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine



Treatments and tests your baby may not need in the hospital

Premature babies often need tests or treatments in the hospital. Some tests and treatments have side effects and risks. So it's important to get just the ones your baby needs. Here are some common tests and treatments your baby may not need.

Heartburn medicine for premature babies.

Premature babies may stop breathing for 15 to 20 seconds at a time during sleep. These breathing pauses tend to go away as the baby develops.

In some cases, doctors give these babies heartburn medicine. They do this because many babies have reflux ("spit up"). Doctors used to think that reflux made the breathing problem worse. But there's little evidence that heartburn medicine helps. In fact, the medicine may be harmful to newborns.

Antibiotics for babies without infections.

When newborns are at risk for infection, doctors may give them antibiotics right away, before they know if the baby has an infection. Doctors do this because blood test results can take 2 days, and it is better to be safe.

The problem is that some babies get antibiotics for too long, even though blood tests are negative and the baby has remained well. In this case, antibiotics



won't help your baby. Also, long-term use of antibiotics in premature babies can cause serious problems, even death.

So, ask your doctor if your baby really needs to continue on the antibiotics.

Pneumograms before babies come home.

Most premature babies stop having breathing pauses by the time they reach full-term development. If they don't, some doctors may order a pneumogram. This is a test that records a baby's breathing, heart rate, and oxygen level during sleep. In some cases, this test may be helpful.

But the test does not help prevent dangerous breathing problems in premature newborns. And the test can lead to more tests and unnecessary worry for parents.

Daily X-rays for premature babies.

Some premature babies need breathing tubes, and some need catheters. Catheters are tubes put into a vein to give medicine, nutrition, and fluids.

From time to time, the hospital takes an X-ray to make sure that the tube hasn't moved. But babies should not get these X-rays every day.

- There is no evidence that a daily X-ray helps prevent any problems.
- Daily X-rays give unnecessary radiation. This may increase the risk of cancer, especially in babies.

Brain MRIs before babies come home.

Premature babies are at risk for problems with brain development. Some doctors check for these problems before sending the baby home. Some may do this using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), a test that takes detailed pictures of the brain. But:

- An MRI can't really tell you how your child's brain will develop over time, especially if the test is abnormal.

Brain development problems can be identified during routine tests at the pediatrician's office.

This report is for you to use when talking with your health-care provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this report is at your own risk.

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Advice from Consumer Reports

Helping your baby stay safe in the hospital

If your baby is in the hospital, you may feel helpless. But there are steps you can take to help keep your baby safe.

Ask the staff how you can help.

The nurses and doctors will welcome your watchful eye.



Make sure hospital staff follows safety measures for catheters.

Staff should disinfect the place where the catheter goes in. And they should change the bandage regularly.

- Ask the staff to follow safety measures.
- Make sure they check your baby every day to see if the catheter is still needed.

Keep hands clean.

- You, and each staff person, should wash hands before touching your baby or the catheter.
- Or use an alcohol-based sanitizer each time.

Speak up.

- If something doesn't seem right, trust your feelings and say something.
- If a staff person doesn't give you an answer that satisfies you, ask to speak to a nurse supervisor.
- Or talk to your baby's doctor.