

The world of neonatal care most definitely has a language all of its own. While on your neonatal journey, you'll hear many words and medical terms which can seem a little overwhelming at first. This glossary is an overview of the most commonly used medical and clinical terms plus abbreviations you may encounter during your time in the unit.

If you hear a term used that you don't understand, please ask your baby's nurse or doctor to explain it or write it down for you. Being able to understand neonatal language will help you feel more informed about the care your baby receives and is one step towards making a difficult start to life a little easier.

In addition to this glossary, we have a range of support resources available at :

www.neonataltrust.org.nz/support

A

Absorb

The body's ability to take in, or incorporate back into the body, fluid or food.

Adjusted age

The term used to describe the age your baby would have been if born full term. For example, a baby born nine weeks early at 31 weeks gestation; at nine months after birth, the adjusted age is 7 months.

Alveoli

Tiny sacs in the lungs where oxygen and carbon dioxide are exchanged with the bloodstream.

Anaesthetic

A drug for bringing on loss of sensation (and hence pain) in many medical and surgical procedures. General anaesthetic (GA) produces unconsciousness and is administered by a specially trained doctor called an anaesthetist.

Antibiotics

Drugs used to fight off bacterial infection. They have names like vancomycin and gentamicin.

Anaemia

The reduction to below normal levels of haemoglobin (red blood cells) in the blood.

Aorta

The artery leading from the heart that supplies oxygenated blood to the body.

Arterial blood gas (arterial sample)

A sample of blood taken from an artery to measure its oxygen, carbon dioxide, and acid content.

Arterial catheter (indwelling arterial catheter)

A thin plastic tube placed in an artery to withdraw blood for testing and to measure blood pressure.

Artery

Any blood vessel leading away from the heart. Arteries carry oxygenated blood to the body tissues (with the exception of the pulmonary artery which carries non-oxygenated blood to the lungs from the heart).

Apgars

A numerical scoring system, usually applied at one and five minutes after the birth of all new born babies. This is to evaluate the condition of the baby based on heart rate, respiration, muscle tone, and colour. Scores are on a scale of one to 10, with 10 being the best score. A baby's condition can alter either way after the first five minutes and therefore your baby can have two Apgar scores that are of different values.

Apnoea

The temporary stopping of breathing by the baby.

Apnoea monitor

A monitor connected to the baby with a sensor, to specifically detect apnoea.

Apnoea mattress

A monitor that uses a sensitive flat pad or mattress to detect apnoea.

Aspiration

Breathing of material into the windpipe (trachea) or lungs, or the removal of material from the windpipe, lungs or stomach by suction.

Asphyxia

A lack of oxygen and high carbon dioxide level in the blood and tissues.

Attachment parenting

Parenting philosophy to create a secure loving relationship, often formed through highly responsive involvement.

To learn more about us, please head to:

www.neonataltrust.org.nz

B

Baby wearing

The practice of “wearing” or carrying baby in a baby wrap on the chest. This can help develop security, bonding and deeper sleep for baby. Can help increase breast milk production.

Bagging

A slang word to describe the procedure of applying a mask connected to a squeezable bag over the baby’s mouth and nose to achieve ventilation of the lungs.

Bilirubin

The name of the breakdown product of red blood cells. Excess amounts cause jaundice, a yellowing of the skin. Bilirubin is excreted in faeces.

Blood gas test

A test performed on a sample of arterial blood to measure that levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the bloodstream are normal.

Blood count

A test of a blood sample to measure the number of red and white blood cells. Also known as a FBC.

Blood pressure (BP)

The pressure or force that the blood exerts against the walls of the arteries in circulation. It is described by two numbers; systolic (the top or high number) and diastolic (the low or bottom number).

Blood transfusion

A procedure for replenishing (topping up) the baby’s blood with adult donor blood.

Bonding

Establishing a close relationship between a parent and child.

Bronchial tubes

The tubes that lead from the windpipe (trachea) to the lungs.

Bronchopulmonary Dysplasia (BPD)

BPD is a lung disease that affects new born babies. In most cases BPD occurs in babies who are born prematurely and have required extra oxygen and/or a ventilator, up to and after 28 days of life, to treat their original lung problem. In many cases, the symptoms of BPD disappear quite rapidly. Some babies with BPD may have breathing difficulties for many months or years.

Bradycardia

An abnormally slow heart rate measured by beats per minute. A foetal or neonate heart beat rate of less than 100 beats per minute is abnormally slow. Normal foetal heart rate is 120 – 160. Neonate’s heart rate averages 140 beats per minute.

Breast pump

A device either hand or electrically operated to extract breast milk.



Look after yourself:

THINK REF!

A parent’s natural instinct is to put all their focus into looking after their precious new baby. However, this often comes at the detriment of looking after themselves – which actually impacts on their baby.

Our ‘Think REF’ Health and Wellbeing resource provides a friendly prompt and practical tips to help parents to be happy, rested and high functioning.

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C

Caffeine

A medication given to babies that helps them to remember to breathe.

Candida

See Thrush.

Capillaries

Very small blood vessels which remove waste from and provide oxygen and nutrients to body cells.

Carbon dioxide (CO₂)

Gaseous bodily waste product transported via the bloodstream and exhaled by the lungs.

CAT scanner or CT scanner (computerised axial tomography)

A computer-controlled x-ray machine capable of capturing cross-section images of body tissues.

Central nervous system

Brain and spinal cord, receives and coordinates all sensory and motor information.

Catheter

A tube used to put fluid into the baby's body, or to drain excessive fluids from the body.

Cerebral

Applying to the structure and functions of the brain.

Chest tube (CT)

A tube surgically inserted in the chest wall to suction away air and allow a collapsed lung to re-expand.

Chromosomes

Each human body cell has 46 chromosomes, 23 pairs. Chromosomes are the genetic blueprint containing all the information making each human unique.

Code of Health and Disability Consumer Rights

Your rights as a health care consumer. Also supports families who wish to make a complaint about services they received.

Colostomy

An opening, created through surgery, to allow the colon (lower part of the large intestine) to empty its contents directly through the wall of the abdomen.

Colostrum

The first breast milk produced after the birth of the baby. It is thick and yellowish in colour, and high in protein and antibodies.

Complementary feed (Comp)

An additional feed of either expressed breast milk or formula milk, after the baby has had a feed from the breast.

Congestive heart failure (CHF)

Failure of the heart to act and perform efficiently because of circulatory imbalance.

CPAP (continuous positive airways pressure)

Keeps the air sacs in the lungs inflated when baby breathes out, this eases the work of breathing.



SUPPORT RESOURCES

The support we provide for families is delivered in a number of different ways, all aimed at

“MAKING A DIFFICULT START TO LIFE THAT LITTLE BIT EASIER”

This includes the support and education material we've developed with the help of graduate parents of a NICU and/or SCBU journey.

They are easy to read support resources on a range of different topics, including:

- **Reading to your Baby**, a practise that helps both parents and the baby
- Thoughts on, and tips for, **Bonding with your baby**
- A resource on going home, **Leaving the Unit**

You can find these at:

www.neonataltrust.org.nz/support

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D

Dehydration

Loss of body fluids. Due to vomiting, sweating caused by overheating or diarrhoea.

Dextrose

A solution of sugar given intravenously (through an IV) to maintain or raise the level of sugar in the blood.

Drip

A common name for an intravenous infusion. The fluid from the IV bag travels through tubing and through a pump which measures and gives an exact volume required to the baby.

Dietitian

Health professional who supports the nutritional wellbeing of mother and child through assessment and education.

E

EBM

Expressed breast milk.

Echo cardiograph or echo (ECG)

The use of ultrasound to examine the structure of the heart. The ultrasound waves are directed at the heart through the chest, with the findings recorded graphically on an echo cardiogram.

Electrode, sensor, or probe

Plastic strip or wire taped to the baby's arm or leg, or a disk taped on a baby's chest to relay signals from the heart, lungs and skin to monitors.

Electrolytes

Essential substances found in everyone's body which are electrically charged and give solutions such as blood or plasma the ability to conduct electric current. A balance of electrolytes is important. Dehydration causes an imbalance and needs treatment with electrolytes.

Endotracheal tube (ET tube)

A plastic tube passed through the baby's nose or mouth into the windpipe (trachea) and connected to a ventilator (respirator).

Engorgement

The process of the breasts becoming uncomfortably large and tight feeling. Felt either initially as the milk comes in several days after the birth, or due to too low a frequency of milk expressing or breast-feeding.

Extended posture

A position in which baby lies with straight arms and legs.

Extubate

Removal of a tube from the trachea (airway) which is attached to a ventilator.

F

Fontanelle

The large soft spot on the top, and the smaller one on the back of the baby's head. They close within 12 to 18 months.

Formula milk

Special preparations of cow's milk or soya bean, modified to closely resemble the chemical composition of human breast milk.

Fourth trimester

A common term for the 3 months after the 40th week of gestation. It is when baby needs to be close to Mum the majority of the time to adjust to the outside world by being held skin-to-skin, cuddled and fed.

Frogging

Positioning support which flexes babies legs into a frog position while covering their body and legs with your hands as a way to calm them through close touch when they are distressed.

READING TO YOUR BABY

Great for both you and your baby.

Your baby has heard voices and sounds from inside the womb and continuing this will help both you and your baby. Even the smallest babies recognise the tone of voice and speech patterns of their families.

Learn more at:

www.neonataltrust.org.nz/support

To learn more about us, please head to:

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G

Gavage feedings

Feedings through a tube inserted through the mouth or nose that goes straight to the stomach.

Gastrostomy

An opening in the abdominal wall, created through surgery, to provide nutrition straight to the stomach when the oesophagus is injured or blocked, or to provide proper drainage after abdominal surgery is performed.

Gestational age

The time (in weeks) from the last menstrual period. A full term pregnancy is 40 weeks.

Glucose

A natural sugar which is a main source of energy for the body.

Grief

A feeling of deep sadness often linked to loss. Grief and loss often experienced in neonatal journeys can be caused by the loss of a full term pregnancy, the loss of breastfeeding or the loss of the healthy baby one had dreamed for.

H

Head circumference

Measurement of the maximum distance around the baby's head.

Head scan

See Ultrasound.

Hernia

(1) umbilical - At the navel or umbilicus, a lump under the skin caused by a part of the intestine protruding through a fragile area in the abdominal wall.

(2) Inguinal - A lump under the skin in the groin area caused by a part of the intestine protruding through a fragile part of the abdominal wall.

Heredity

Characteristics transmitted from one generation to another in genes on the chromosomes.

Haemoglobin (HB)

The colouring of red blood cells, carrying oxygen from the lungs to body tissues.

Haemorrhage

A medical term to describe bleeding, either inside or outside the body.

Heel prick

A small prick in the baby's heel, made so a blood sample can be obtained for testing usually for blood gases or blood glucose levels.

Hind milk

Breast milk of a much higher fat content which follows the let-down reflex once baby has been suckling for a few moments.

Hypoglycemia

The condition of having a low level of sugar in the blood.



KANGAROO CUDDLES

Great for your baby and you.

Multiple studies have proven that skin-to-skin 'Kangaroo cuddles' has a number of benefits for both parents and babies including:

- Fewer breathing problems
- Faster weight gain
- Less energy-wasting fidgeting
- A more constant body temperature

You can find these at:

www.neonataltrust.org.nz/support

To learn more about us, please head to:

www.neonataltrust.org.nz

I

Incubator

Special enclosed bed for a new born in which temperature, oxygen, and humidity can be controlled.

Infection

The invasion of a person's body either internally or externally with rapidly multiplying micro-organisms, in other words bugs. A bacterial infection is usually fought with an antibiotic.

Viral infections cannot be treated with an antibiotic.

Intravenous (IV)

The administration of fluids, or drugs through a hollow needle inserted into a vein.

Intubation

The passing of a small plastic tube through the mouth into the baby's trachea as a part of the ventilation process.

Isolation

The name for the area where babies are nursed on their own, in case they pass on their contagious infections to other babies or because they need protecting as they are more fragile.

IUGR

Intra uterine growth retardation (see SGA).

IV (Intravenous)

Into the vein.

JK

Jaundice

The yellow colour of a baby's skin caused by raised bilirubin in the blood.

Kangaroo cuddles

The practise of skin-to-skin cuddling. Once babies are well enough, they can be placed on their parent's chest, usually under their clothes, so the baby gets skin-to-skin contact and can hear the parent's heartbeat.

Talking or reading while kangaroo cuddling is especially good as the vibrations through the chest assist with bonding and relaxation.

L

Lactation

The body's process of making breast milk.

Lanugo

The soft downy hair all over the body that a lot of premature babies are born with. This falls out after a short while.

Lipids (a white fluid)

Fats required to promote growth. Used in conjunction with TPN as a total food for baby when baby is not able to feed by mouth. Normally administered via a long line.

Liquor

Amniotic fluid.

Long Line

An IV that generally lasts for a long time. It is positioned in a central vein and has less likelihood of being infected.

Lumbar puncture

A procedure for investigating diseased cerebrospinal fluid. Carried out by inserting a needle between the vertebrae at the bottom of the spine (waist height), to tap cerebrospinal fluid and occasionally to inject drugs into the cerebrospinal fluid.



PERSONAL STORIES

The personal stories section on our website is where you can read about families who have been on a neonatal journey.

We receive a lot of positive feedback from families in a neonatal unit who read these stories and feel strength, hope and positivity knowing they are not alone going through these experiences & feeling certain emotions.

Access these stories at:

www.neonataltrust.org.nz/personal-stories

To learn more about us, please head to:

www.neonataltrust.org.nz

M

Meconium

A greenish-black, mucus-like substance present in the intestines of new-born babies. This is usually the first bowel motion after birth.

Meconium aspiration

Inhalation or breathing in by a foetus of amniotic fluid that has meconium in it. Caused when a foetus becomes stressed prior to delivery. The sticky material irritates and partially blocks the airways causing breathing difficulties during the newly-born period.

Monitor

A machine used to observe and record such functions as breathing, temperature, and heart rate. Electrodes and sensors are connected to this machine.

MRI (Magnetic resonance imaging)

MRI is a painless test used to view the inside of the body without using x-rays. It uses a large magnet, safe low energy radio waves and a computer, to produce two or three-dimensional pictures.

Muscle tone

The ability to flex or be in a curled up position. This position for premature babies helps them to reserve energy. High tone is tight muscles, low tone is floppy muscles.

Mucus

Slimy substance found in the nose and windpipe.

Multiple

One or more (usually referring to the number of babies born at the same time to one mother).

Murmur

Sound of turbulent blood flow in heart or blood vessel.

N

NAD

No abnormalities detected. Often seen in babies notes after tests.

Nasogastric tube

A very thin flexible tube that can be passed through a nostril or by the mouth, to the stomach via the throat. Babies can be either tube-fed or have the contents of their stomach checked by aspirating.

NEC (Necrotizing Enterocolitis)

An inflammation of the gut wall and lining that affects some premature babies.

Neonatal

New born, describing the first 28 days of life (although many babies are in the Unit for longer than 28 days).

Neonatologist

A doctor who is specially trained in the care of sick and premature new borns.

Nesting

Term used to describe creating a nest like structure around baby in the incubator to provide a snug sense of deeper security. Position hands together near the face for self soothing and feet together to promote correct muscle and joint development.

NG Tube (Nasogastric Tube)

Used for feeding babies too young to suck milk from the breast or a bottle.



Occupational therapist

Health professional who can provide therapy to support the physical, emotional and sensory development of a neonatal baby. This support can be in the home after discharge if needed.

O/G tube

A tube passed through the mouth, via the oesophagus into the baby's stomach for feeding or suction purposes

Open incubator

An open bed incubator with an overhead warmer (heater) to keep baby's body temperature constant.

Oxygen

A gas making up about 21% of the air we breathe. Some babies who have breathing difficulties may need more oxygen than is in the air. It is measured in percentages and in litres per minute.

To learn more about us, please head to:

P

Patent ductus arteriosus (PDA)

A typical situation in premature babies where the fetal blood vessel which links the aorta and the pulmonary artery does not close following birth.

Phototherapy

Treatment for jaundice which uses ultra-violet or halogen light directed at the baby in the incubator. Treatment usually lasts for several days.

Plunket nurse

Community nurse who tracks your babies development from birth to 5 on discharge from hospital. They are often not specialist in premature or neonatal babies, but can screen for developmental concerns and refer on where needed.

Pneumothorax

A leak of air out of baby's lungs, but still within the chest cavity. This can press on the lungs and will usually require draining away outside the body through a chest tube.

Post Natal Depression (PND)

Feeling sad, useless, helpless, overwhelmed or anxious for longer than a month, which can make it hard to bond with baby. Affects 15% of new mothers, possibly more in those with premature or unwell babies. Let your health professional know if you are experiencing low feelings, as help is available.

Pulse

The rhythmic expansion and contraction of an artery with blood flow which may be felt with the finger.

Pulse oximeter

A monitor which measures the amount of oxygen in the baby's blood stream. It is usually fixed to the foot or the hand. It has a red light.

Plasma

The fluid component of blood in which the blood cells are suspended.

Prone

Describes the position of the baby, when lying on its stomach.

R

Reflexes

A series of actions which happen automatically. Some reflexes like moro reflex; the reaction to being startled can be present from 28 weeks gestation. Reflexes show the maturity of the central nervous system. Rooting reflex, the response to something in the mouth is not fully developed until around 36 weeks which is why babies who are born prematurely may have an immature ability to breast feed.

Respirator

A machine (also known as a Ventilator) which regularly pumps air in and out of the lungs when baby cannot breathe for themselves.

Retinopathy of prematurity (ROP)

The abnormal growth of blood vessels of the eye, seen in many premature infants. This happens because the blood vessels are not finished developing at the time of a premature infant's birth. They have to finish developing outside the protected environment of the womb.

RDS (Respiratory distress syndrome also known as Hyaline Membrane Disease)

Usually baby's lungs are kept open by a chemical, called surfactant, which everyone has in their lungs. Some babies have less surfactant and the alveoli (small air sacs in the lung) start to close up, making it really hard for baby to breathe. The baby develops RDS, and has increasing difficulty in breathing. Babies are ventilated and may be given artificial surfactant.

Retina

The back of the eye where blood-vessels supplying the light-sensitive cells are located.

Room air

The air that we normally breathe (contains 21% oxygen).

Rooming-in

The time when you stay overnight at the hospital and have total care of your baby just prior to coming home.

**BLOOD IS CRITICAL FOR MANY
NEONATAL JOURNEYS**



To learn more, head to:

www.neonataltrust.org.nz/blood

To learn more about us, please head to:

www.neonataltrust.org.nz

S

Sedation

The use of a drug which quiets the baby down, promoting less movement and a placid state of being. This is sometimes done to babies who are being ventilated, so they don't fight the ventilator and become more stressed.

Self regulation

The ability to regulate one's own behaviour. Babies around 40 weeks gestation do this through sucking thumbs, grasping objects or hand clasping to calm or soothe themselves. A preterm baby will require extra environmental supports while the skill to self regulate develops. This includes 'frogging', providing something to suck on, or 'nesting'.

Sensory system

The system in which all our sensory information is interpreted - touch, taste, sight, hearing, smell, vestibular (movement), proprioceptive (pressure). Premature babies sensory systems are not fully developed so they can be extra sensitive when receiving this information via the body. Extra care is needed to create a gentle calm environment that cares for the sensory system for neonatal babies while they continue to develop.

Septicaemia

An infection in the bloodstream affecting the whole body.

Shunt

A passage made artificially, between two areas of the body, usually placed to drain liquid.

Skin to skin (see Kangaroo cuddles)

Direct skin to skin contact with baby, on parents chest. Benefits of this are well reported and evidence based, including improvement of heart and lung function, stabilisation of body temperature, increase in breastmilk production and pain relief. As much skin to skin contact as possible should be provided, for periods of longer than 1 hour.

SGA (Small for gestation age or small for dates)

Babies born weighing a lot less than other babies of the same gestation at birth.

Social worker

Health professional who provides information and resources to support the social needs of a family, including assessment for access to financial support.

Speech and language therapist

Health professional who can help with oral motor development including breast/bottle feeding.

Squint or Strabismus

A condition in which the eye muscles can't hold both eyes' focus to look in the same direction. This gives a cross-eyed look which is more noticeable when the baby is tired.

Sterile

Free from contamination by living microbes (bugs).

Steroids

(1) A large group of chemically related compounds of diverse origin and function. Those related to cortisol from the adrenal gland can help to mature the lungs of a foetus before birth.

(2) Used to reduce lung swelling in BPD.

Stimulation

(1) developmental encouragement given to the baby, either by talking, singing, reading or having things to look at.

(2) Physical encouragement to continue breathing, such as tickling or a gentle prod when an Apnoea occurs.

Supplementary

In addition to. Usually refers to adding vitamins and minerals to the baby's diet, or complementing breast with milk formula feeding.

Suture

(1) Stitches for holding together surgical incisions.

(2) Lines in a baby's skull.

Suction

Aspiration of gas or fluid, usually from the lungs by mechanical means.

Surfactant

Compounds which line the air sacs (alveoli) of the lungs reducing surface tension and thereby preventing lung collapse on breathing out (expiration). Artificial or synthetic surfactant is now available for those infants who have difficulty producing their own shortly after birth. It is given to babies through the ventilator. Surfactants have names like Curosurf.

Syringe

An apparatus for injecting into, or withdrawing fluids from, the body.

Swaddling

Wrapping baby in a wrap to apply deep pressure to soothe and reassure baby. Reminds baby of the close womb environment.

To learn more about us, please head to:

T

Tachycardia

Rapid heart rate, above 170 beats per minute.

Tachypnoea

Rapid breathing rate, over 60 breaths per minute.

Thrush

A fungal infection.

Thermacot

A bed that has a warmed gel mattress to help babies maintain their temperature. Babies also have bedding as they would in a cot.

TPN (total parenteral nutrition)

A mixture of sugar, minerals, vitamins and proteins given via IV.

Trachea

The windpipe, which extends from the throat to the bronchial tubes.

U

UTI

Urinary tract infection.

Ultrasound

A fetal ultrasound, or sonogram, is an imaging technique that uses high-frequency sound waves to produce images of a baby in the uterus. These images can help your health care provider evaluate your baby's growth and development and determine how your pregnancy is progressing.

V

Vein

A blood vessel which carries de-oxygenated blood from the body to the heart, and then the lungs.

Ventricle

(1) A tiny chamber, as in those of the heart.

(2) Tiny chambers in the middle of the brain where cerebrospinal fluid is created.

Virus

A small infectious organism that thrives in the cells of the body.



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