

NICU Glossary

We use many medical terms in the NICU. Here are some you may come across during your stay with us; you are always welcome to ask questions about anything you hear.

Anemia - a low number of red blood cells in the blood. NICU babies are not always able to make red blood cells quickly enough to replace the ones lost when blood is taken from them for testing.

Antibiotics - a type of medication used to treat a suspected or actual bacterial infection. Until the specific bacterium is identified, babies receive combination antibiotics to treat them for the most “common” types of infections.

Apgar Score - a number given at one and five minutes of age that measures the baby’s condition based on heart rate, breathing, muscle tone, activity level and colour.

Apnea – the premature baby has an immature brain, and this means he/she may occasionally forget to breathe. Premature babies may then require stimulation (a gentle rub on the back) to remind them. This is common for premature babies and usually subsides by 34-35 weeks, as their brain matures.

Aspirate - breast milk or formula that is left in the baby’s stomach from the previous feeding. Assessing the presence and amount of aspirate helps guide the nurse when deciding whether or not the baby is ready to have his or her feeding volume increased.

Aspiration - the direct result of inhaling any foreign matter into the lungs.

Bagging - a special way to give babies oxygen and/ or extra breaths using an air filled bag.

Bilirubin - a product of the breakdown of red blood cells, filtered out of the blood by the liver. The premature baby’s liver is immature and therefore does not filter as well as it should. This causes the bilirubin to build up in the blood resulting in jaundice (a yellow/ orange hue to the skin).

Blood Gas - a sample of blood that measures the level of oxygen, carbon dioxide and acid (pH) in the blood. It is used to measure how well your baby is ventilating and or breathing.

Bradycardia (BRADY) - any decrease in the baby's heart rate below 100 beats per minute that lasts longer than 15 seconds and requires stimulation to correct. It is frequently associated with apnea (see above) and happens less often as the baby matures.

CBC (Complete Blood Count) - a blood test done for several reasons, including to determine if an infection may be present and to see whether or not the baby is anemic (see anemia, above).

Corrected Age - the age of a baby from the due date, not the birth date.

CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) – is a type of respiratory support used to deliver constant air pressure into a baby's nose, which helps the air sacs in the lungs stay open and helps prevent apnea.

Cyanosis - dusky, bluish color of the skin, lips, and nail beds caused by having too little oxygen in the blood.

Desaturation (DESATS) - when the oxygen level in the blood falls below the set value on the saturation monitor. Acceptable levels of oxygen vary depending upon the baby's age, and the monitor alarm limits are set accordingly.

EBM (Expressed Breastmilk) - milk that mothers express using a breast pump or hand expression. This milk can be used soon after it is pumped, or it can be frozen and saved for later use.

Fortifier - human milk fortifier is a powdered substance added to breast milk to give it extra calories and minerals such as calcium and phosphorous.

Gestational Age - the number of weeks a woman is pregnant; the age at which a baby is born.

Glucose - a type of sugar in the blood. Different types of glucose monitoring are done but the most common is done using a glucometer at the bedside.

Heart Monitor - this monitor shows the heartbeat on a special computer screen. Three gelled electrodes (leads) sit on the baby's skin. An alarm rings if the readings are not within the normal limits. False alarms are common and usually happen when the baby wiggles or a lead falls off.

Hypoglycemia - low blood sugar.

Interstitial - refers to an IV that is no longer in the vein and must be restarted.

Incubator – a heated and humidified bed specifically for babies in the NICU. The incubator is often referred to by the manufacturer's name - Drager[®].

Intravenous (IV) - a small catheter placed a short distance into a vein to provide fluid and or medications. Babies can have IV's in their scalp, hands, arms, legs, or feet. These sites are rotated regularly.

IUGR (Intra-Uterine Growth Restricted) - when a baby's growth slows or ceases while it is in the uterus.

Jaundice (Hyperbilirubinemia) - the yellow color seen in the skin usually during the first 2 weeks of life, due to the buildup of broken down blood cells.

Lipids - a white, high calorie fat solution that is delivered by IV or mixed in with your infant's milk/formula.

Low Flow - refers to one of the many ways to deliver oxygen and/or air to babies.

Lumbar Puncture - a small needle is placed in the baby's lower back using sterile technique to get a very small amount of spinal fluid for specialized testing.

Lytes (Electrolytes) - the measurement of sodium, potassium, chloride in the baby's blood. The results of this test help the medical staff treat the baby.

Meconium - the first, thick black stools passed by a baby. These stools can last for several days and are thick and tar-like.

Murmur - a “whooshing” sound of blood going through the heart and surrounding blood vessels. It is detected by using a stethoscope and listening to the heartbeat on the chest or back. Murmurs are common in premature babies. They can be a sign of a PDA (see below) or other heart problem, or they can be benign.

Nasogastric Tube / Orogastric Tube (NGT/OGT) - this tube is placed through the nose or mouth to the stomach and is secured with tape. It is a way to feed the baby and to release built up air and gas in the stomach.

Nasal Prongs - small soft plastic prongs that are placed in the baby’s nose to deliver oxygen or air.

NEC (Necrotizing Enterocolitis) - a serious bowel condition that can arise unexpectedly in premature infants in the NICU. Babies with it can have bloating, blood in stools, and feeding intolerance; they can become very sick.

NPO - nothing by mouth (not feeding).

PDA (Patent Ductus Arteriosus) - the ductus is a blood vessel that keeps the blood away from the lungs before a baby is born because the lungs are filled with fluid. Usually the ductus closes shortly after birth. If the ductus stays open (or patent) it may interfere with normal blood flow, heart and lung function. The PDA may be treated with medication or surgery if necessary. For more information, please go to:

<http://www.sickkids.ca/familyinformation/documents/pda/PDAwebsite.html>

Phototherapy (Bili Lights) - a special blue light used in the treatment of some types of jaundice. Eye shields are placed over the baby’s eyes to protect them from the light.

Pneumothorax - a collection of air in the space between the lung and the chest wall, but outside the lung.

Respiratory Distress Syndrome - the most common breathing problem found in premature babies. Because the baby may be too young to have developed an important substance called surfactant, the tiny air sacs in their lungs (alveoli) do not stay open easily, as they should. Without surfactant, the air sacs collapse and the baby cannot get enough air into his lungs to breathe effectively. Surfactant therapy sends surfactant down a

tube into the lungs, which helps makes the lungs more flexible and eases ventilation.

Oxygen Saturation (SAT) – a term that describes the amount of oxygen in the blood.

Saturation (“SAT”) Monitor - a monitor that shows the amount of oxygen in the blood. The small monitor is placed around a baby’s foot or hand/wrist and can be easily identified by the red light. The light does not produce heat.

Sepsis - an infection that occurs in the blood. If there is any question that an infection may be developing, blood samples are drawn (culture, CBC) and antibiotics are started.

Septic Work-Up - includes blood drawn for CBC, and Blood Culture. If the baby is very ill the medical team may request that spinal fluid or urine be obtained and sent for culture.

Spell - a term that also describes a brady, apnea or a desat (see above).

Tachycardia - a heart rate that is faster than the average range. The average range for premature babies is 120-160. A full term baby’s heart rate would be slightly lower at 90-140 beats per minute.

Tachypnea - a breathing rate that is faster than the average range. Premature babies breathe at an average rate of 40-60 breaths per minute. Full term babies breathe at an average rate of 30-60 breaths per minute.

TPN (Total Parenteral Nutrition) - an IV solution (often yellow) that contains nutrients to help a baby grow. TPN is used when a baby is not able, or is just starting to feed.

UVC (Umbilical Venous Catheter) - a soft, clear catheter placed into the vein in the umbilical cord. This line is used to give fluids and medications. In very sick or premature babies this line is placed at birth using sterile technique.

Vitamin K - helps blood to clot normally; all babies receive one intramuscular injection at birth.

Weight Conversion Chart - Converting grams to pounds

	lbs	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
oz						Grams						
0		0	454	907	1361	1814	2266	2722	3175	3629	4082	4536
1		28	482	936	1399	1843	2268	2750	3203	3657	4111	4564
2		57	510	964	1417	1871	2325	2778	3232	3695	4139	4593
3		85	539	992	1446	1899	2353	2807	3260	3714	4167	4621
4		113	567	1021	1474	1928	2381	2835	3289	3742	4196	4649
5		142	595	1049	1503	1956	2410	2863	3317	3770	4224	4678
6		170	624	1077	1531	1984	2438	2892	3345	3799	4252	4706
7		198	652	1106	1559	2013	2466	2920	3374	3827	4281	4734
8		227	680	1134	1568	2041	2495	2948	3402	3856	4309	4763
9		255	709	1162	1616	2070	2523	2977	3430	3884	4337	4791
10		283	737	1191	1644	2098	2551	3005	3459	3912	4366	4819
11		312	765	1219	1673	2126	2580	3033	3487	3941	4394	4848
12		340	794	1247	1701	2155	2608	3062	3515	3969	4423	4876
13		369	822	1276	1729	2183	2637	3090	3544	3997	4451	4904
14		397	850	1304	1758	2211	2665	3118	3572	4026	4479	4983
15		425	879	1332	1786	2240	2693	3147	3600	4054	4508	4961