



Meconium in Labour

10-20% of babies pass meconium before birth. This leaflet explains what meconium is, why some babies pass it before birth, and how we will help ensure your baby is well.

What is meconium?

- Meconium is a sticky, black stool which the majority of babies pass on the first few days after birth before developing a soft yellow stool.
- In 10-20% of births, a baby will have passed some meconium whilst still in the womb.

Why do babies pass meconium before delivery?

- There are several reasons why a baby may pass meconium whilst still in the womb. These include:
 - Being born post-term For example After 41 weeks gestation
 - Infection before or during labour
 - Reduced oxygen flow to the baby during or shortly before birth (this is very unlikely to be the cause if your baby was born in good condition and did not need significant resuscitation).

What is the effect of meconium on my baby?

- There is a small risk of meconium blocking a baby's airway (breathing passage) at birth. In most cases this can be managed by simple suctioning of the airway. For this reason a Paediatrician will be present at the birth of babies who have passed significant meconium.
- A small proportion of babies who have passed significant meconium can develop **Meconium Aspiration Syndrome**. This can cause a baby to have difficulty with breathing these signs present shortly after birth.

What will happen to my baby after birth?

- As with all babies, your baby will have a full physical examination, carried out by a Paediatrician or midwife.
- Your midwife and other staff on the postnatal ward will support you in feeding your baby, and make sure that your baby is feeding well before you go home.
- The midwives and doctors looking after your baby will be aware of the possible effects of meconium, and will discuss any concerns with you.
- If you have any concerns that your baby may be struggling to feed, or showing any other symptoms (see later), you can discuss this with your midwife or health visitor at any time.



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How long do I need to stay in the hospital for?

- If your midwife feels that the meconium was not significant, and your baby is otherwise healthy and feeding well, your baby **may be able to go home after six hours** of age.
- If there was significant meconium, your baby will need to be observed in hospital for **at least 12 hours** after birth.

What observations will be done for my baby?

Whilst in hospital, your baby will have the following observations taken regularly:

- Heart rate
- Respiratory (breathing) rate
- Temperature.
- Staff will also check that your baby does not have any signs of respiratory distress (breathing difficulty) and is feeding well.

When you take your baby home, you should continue to look for any signs which might suggest your baby is unwell.

The following signs/symptoms may mean your baby is unwell – if any of these are present you should get your baby seen by a midwife or doctor urgently

- **Colour** – pale or blue
- **Sleep** – if your baby is very sleepy or not waking for feeds
- **Feeding** – if your baby is struggling to feed or not having wet/dirty nappies
- **Breathing:**
 - Fast breathing (more than one breath per second)
 - Grunting (a noise made on breathing out)
 - Recession (sucking in of the chest between and below the ribs)
 - Tracheal tug (sucking in of the skin at the front of the neck).

Anything else which makes you think your baby is unwell; please contact your midwife, General practitioner (GP) or 101 for advice.

From 1st January 2019 smoking will not be permitted on any NHS site in England. Smoking will not be permitted within any of our buildings or anywhere outside on our sites. Smoking facilities will not be provided. Please be considerate of others when vaping in hospital grounds.

This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email gwh.pals@nhs.net

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