

# Providing Mouth Care for your baby



Doncaster and Bassetlaw  
Teaching Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust



Your baby's mouth is important for eating, drinking, tasting, communication, breathing and preventing infection.

Giving mouth care will provide hygiene and comfort to your baby.



## The main aims of mouth care are to:

- Ensure a clean, soft and healthy mouth lining, tongue and lips of your baby
- Reduce discomfort and freshen the mouth of your baby
- Reduce potential bacteria in the mouth and therefore reduce the risk of infection
- Provide an early positive experience of tasting and smell of your colostrum, breastmilk or water, dependant on your feeding preference.

## Breastfeeding and mouth care

Colostrum is the first secretion of milk from the breast after birth. Babies that are able to receive colostrum or freshly expressed breast milk can receive benefits including:

- Antibacterial and antiviral antibodies
- Anti-inflammatory properties
- Immune function protection.

Even though babies do not swallow the milk, they can absorb the beneficial nutrients through the lining of the mouth.

You can choose to express your milk to enable your baby to receive the benefits of colostrum and breastmilk. Sterile water can also be used.

Please ask your midwife/nurse looking after your baby if you require any information or assistance with this.

## Providing mouth care

You will be shown how to provide mouth care for your baby when you feel ready and your baby is stable. Once you feel confident you will be able to do this whenever you feel it is needed.

Mouth care is usually provided as part of regular baby care. This is when nappy changes and probe sites are changed and repositioning is done. This is usually approximately every 3-6 hours, but can differ dependant on your baby's individual needs.

Babies should be awake when you are performing mouth care.

It is important remember to be guided by your baby's behavioural cues during this process. For example, if your baby appears to dislike what you are doing by grimacing, gagging, or appearing startled, you may want to pause a moment.

Giving mouth care prior or during a tube feed can aid your baby's development by helping them to associate the taste and smell of milk with being fed and feeling satisfied.

## Equipment needed for mouth care

- Gauze swabs
- Sterile water, Colostrum, freshly expressed breast milk or formula
- Nappy bag to dispose of waste.

## How to perform mouth care

1. It is first important that your hands are clean. Please wash your hands before getting started.
2. Take the gauze, dip it into milk or water, and squeeze to remove excess liquid.
3. If using colostrum or expressed breast milk you may want to suck up 0.2 - 0.3ml in a syringe to put onto a piece of rolled up gauze. Colostrum can also be given into the baby's cheek 0.1-0.2ml at a time with a colostrum syringe. Support and supervision will be required from the nurse/midwife looking after your baby.
4. Introduce the gauze gently and slowly roll across the lips to loosen and remove any coating/debris if possible. Then, rub the gauze over the gums and tongue. Be led by your baby's behavioural cues at this stage. If your baby appears to dislike what you are doing, pause and offer again when you think your baby is ready.
5. When performing mouth care it is important to check the appearance of their mouth. The mouth should look moist and pink. Inform your baby's nurse if their mouth looks dry, sore, swollen red, cracked, bleeding or have a white coating, and they will be able to help.
6. Dispose of the swab and use a new one if you need to repeat. This is important as re-dipping can introduce bacteria to the liquid.

7. Once finished dispose of used equipment.
8. Wash hands again once finished.

Some babies who require treatment for thrush receive a medicine that is given into the mouth. This medicine is usually called Nystatin or Daktarin oral gel. It is best to give this after mouth care or feeds so that the medication stays in place to be as effective as possible. The best way to do this is the same way as mouth care is given.

If you have any questions regarding mouth care or need further information, please have a conversation with your baby's nurse.

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service**

The team are available to help with any concerns, complaints or questions you may have about your experience at the Trust. Their office is in the Main Foyer (Gate 4) of Doncaster Royal Infirmary. Contact can be made either in person, by telephone or email.

### **The contact details are:**

Telephone: 01302 642764 or 0800 028 8059

Email: [dbth.pals.dbh@nhs.net](mailto:dbth.pals.dbh@nhs.net)