



PATIENT INFORMATION

# USE OF PROBIOTICS IN PRETERM INFANTS



## **What is different about feeding premature babies?**

We know that premature babies tolerate milk best if it is introduced gradually. Until they are able to tolerate enough milk, we feed most premature babies with a special intravenous liquid feed called Parenteral Nutrition (“PN”) which contains amino acids, sugar, fat, vitamins and minerals to help your baby to grow.

Some babies find digesting milk difficult and take longer than others to manage this. Most babies remain well, but around 2-5% of very low birthweight babies can become unwell with a condition called ‘NEC’ (Necrotising Enterocolitis) in which there is inflammation of the gut.

Many babies who get NEC recover fully, but it can sometimes be serious, sometimes needs an operation, and can occasionally be life-threatening.

## **What are probiotics?**

Probiotics are harmless bacteria that live in our gut, and help to keep our intestines healthy. They can stop harmful bacteria growing in the intestine and can help prevent conditions such as diarrhoea (gastroenteritis) and necrotising enterocolitis (NEC).

It is a treatment that contains the friendly bacteria that would usually be found in the intestine of breast-fed babies born at term. It is similar to drinking live yoghurt products. The bacteria are obtained by purifying a yoghurt type liquid, so that your baby does not receive the milk component.

Probiotics in babies has been standard treatment in many neonatal units worldwide for many years and a growing number of neonatal units in the UK give probiotics like Labinic routinely to preterm babies.

## **How are probiotics taken?**

Labinic is given with milk feeds. It is given daily until your baby reaches 34 weeks corrected age, or may be continued if there are difficulties with tolerating milk feeds.

## **What are the benefits?**

Preterm babies frequently have unusual bacteria in their intestines, often as a result of other treatments we need to use, such as antibiotics. These unusual bacteria can increase the risk of serious diseases, such as Necrotising Enterocolitis (NEC), which is a severe inflammatory disease of the bowel. Probiotics work by replacing these with normal bacteria, and by strengthening your baby’s immune response to infection.

There is good research evidence that probiotics protect babies, reduce NEC and improve babies’ ability to tolerate milk feeds.

### **Are there any risks?**

Research has shown probiotics to be safe and well tolerated when given with milk. They may occasionally cause abdominal discomfort, diarrhoea and /or flatulence. Infection is possible but very rare and usually relatively minor and easy to treat according to published literature for probiotics in general. In the unlikely event that this happens we have antibiotics available that kill the probiotic bacteria. Probiotics may be temporarily stopped if your baby becomes unwell or feeds are stopped for any reason.

### **Are there alternatives?**

There are no alternatives to probiotics. However, there are a number of different brands supplying probiotics.

If you would like further information on the probiotic your baby is receiving, please speak to the nurse/doctor looking after your baby.

### **Any further questions?**

Please feel free to discuss this with the nurse caring for your baby or the consultant on duty, who will answer any queries you may have.

There is also the supplier's information webpage at [www.biofloratech.com](http://www.biofloratech.com)

**If your symptoms or condition worsens, or if you are concerned about anything, please call your GP, 111, or 999.**

### **Patient Experience**

We know that being admitted to hospital can be a difficult and unsettling time for you and your loved ones. If you have any questions or concerns, please do speak with a member of staff on the ward or in the relevant department who will do their best to answer your questions and reassure you.

### **Feedback**

Feedback is really important and useful to us – it can tell us where we are working well and where improvements can be made. There are lots of ways you can share your experience with us including completing our Friends and Family Test – cards are available and can be posted on all wards, departments and clinics at our hospitals. We value your comments and feedback and thank you for taking the time to share this with us.

### **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

If you have any concerns or questions about your care, we advise you to talk with the nurse in charge or the department manager in the first instance as they are best placed to answer any questions or resolve concerns quickly. If the relevant member of staff is unable to help resolve your concern, you can contact the PALS Team. We offer informal help, advice or support about any aspect of hospital services & experiences.

Our PALS team will liaise with the various departments in our hospitals on your behalf, if you feel unable to do so, to resolve your problems and where appropriate refer to outside help.

If you are still unhappy you can contact the Complaints Department, who can investigate your concerns. You can make a complaint orally, electronically or in writing and we can advise and guide you through the complaints procedure.

### **How to contact PALS:**

**Telephone Patient Services: 0300 123 1732 or via email at: [wah-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:wah-tr.PET@nhs.net)**

### **Opening times:**

The PALS telephone lines are open Monday to Thursday from 8.30am to 4.30pm and Friday: 8.30am to 4.00pm. Please be aware that a voicemail service is in use at busy times, but messages will be returned as quickly as possible.

If you are unable to understand this leaflet, please communicate with a member of staff.