

NECROTIZING ENTEROCOLITIS (NEC)

**SAINT BARNABAS MEDICAL CENTER
NEONATAL INTENSIVE CARE UNIT**

What is necrotizing enterocolitis?

Necrotizing enterocolitis is a problem that sometimes develops in the intestines (or bowels) of newborn babies. In necrotizing enterocolitis, part of the intestine gets inflamed (swollen, painful). That part of the intestine can die so your baby will not be given feedings while being treated for this.

Necrotizing enterocolitis can be very mild, causing inflammation of just the lining of the intestine, or it can be very severe, causing inflammation and death of the whole wall of a part of the intestines.

What causes necrotizing enterocolitis?

No one knows for sure what causes it. Some babies are more likely to have it, such as babies who:

- are premature
- have infections
- had a difficult birth
- needed blood exchange transfusions
- have breathing problems

What are the signs and symptoms of necrotizing enterocolitis?

- Bloated stomach
- Blood in the baby's bowel movements (visible or hidden)
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Inability to tolerate feedings (either by mouth or by feeding tube)
- Less activity than usual
- Unstable temperature
- Low blood pressure
- Breathing problems

How does the doctor know your baby has necrotizing enterocolitis?

- By examining your baby
- By checking bowel movements for blood
- By doing x-rays of abdomen
- By doing blood tests

How will necrotizing enterocolitis be treated?

- Feedings will be stopped, so that no food goes into the intestine and it can “rest.”
- Your baby will need an IV to get fluids and nutrition.
- A small soft tube will be placed into your baby’s nose or mouth that goes to the stomach. This helps remove fluids and gas.
- Your baby will have more x-rays and blood tests.
- Your baby may receive IV antibiotic medicines.
- Your baby’s pulse, blood pressure, temperature, and breathing will be checked often.
- Your baby may need surgery to remove the part of the intestine that has died or is damaged. Often a baby with necrotizing enterocolitis needs to have an “ostomy”, which is an opening on the abdomen to let the bowel movements out. This is usually closed later in the baby’s life.
- If your baby has surgery, he or she might need to have a breathing tube in their throat to help them breathe after surgery. It will be taken out when your baby is better.

If you have any further questions, please ask your nurse or doctor.