

Editorial Note on Birth Asphyxia

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Editorial Note

The term Asphyxia refers to lack of oxygen and blood flow to the brain. It occurs when baby's brain and other organs do not get enough oxygen and nutrients before, during or right after birth. Without oxygen and nutrients, cells cannot work properly. Waste products (acids) build up in the cells and cause damage.

Some of the causes of decreased oxygen before or during the birth process may include:

- Inadequate oxygen levels in the mother's blood due to heart/respiratory problems/ lowered respirations caused by anesthesia
- Low blood pressure in the mother
- Inadequate relaxation of the uterus during labor that prevents oxygen circulation to the placenta
- Early separation of the placenta from the uterus(placental abruption)
- Compression of the umbilical cord which decreases blood flow
- Poor placenta function that may occur with high blood pressure or in post-term pregnancies, particularly those past 42 weeks

Signs and Symptoms:

- Each baby may experience distinct symptoms of birth asphyxia. The following are the most common symptoms

Before delivery, symptoms may include:

- Abnormal heart rate or rhythm
- An increased acid level in a baby's blood

At birth, symptoms may include:

- Bluish or pale skin colour
- Low heart rate
- Weak muscle tone and reflexes
- Weak cry
- Gasping or weak breathing
- Meconium(the first stool passed by the baby – in the amniotic fluid, which can block small airways and interfere with breathing)

Diagnosis:

The following tests are used to diagnose birth asphyxia:

- Severe acid levels – pH less than 7.00 – in the arterial blood of the umbilical cord.
- Neurological problems, such as seizures, coma and poor muscle tone.
- Respiratory distress, low blood pressure, or other signs of low blood flow to the kidneys or intestines.

Problems in baby's circulatory, digestive and respiratory systems may also suggest that a baby has birth asphyxia.

Treatment:

Birth asphyxia is a complex condition which is difficult to predict or prevent. Prompt treatment is important to minimize the effect.

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