

Understanding Necrotising Enterocolitis (NEC)



What is necrotising enterocolitis?

The words **necrotising enterocolitis** [neck-ro-tie-zing en-tear-oh-ko-lie-tis], or NEC, describe a disease of the intestines.

With NEC, part of the lining of the intestine breaks down. This affects how the baby's digestive system processes food.

What causes NEC?

The cause of NEC is not known. NEC is most common in premature babies and/or babies who are already ill. Other possible risk factors may include:

- Low birth weight
- **Chorioamnionitis** (infection in the placenta and the fluid surrounding the baby. This most often happens when there is a long period of time between when the mother's water breaks and when the baby is delivered).
- Low oxygen levels during birth
- **Congenital** heart disease
- **Blood exchange transfusion**

What are the symptoms of NEC?

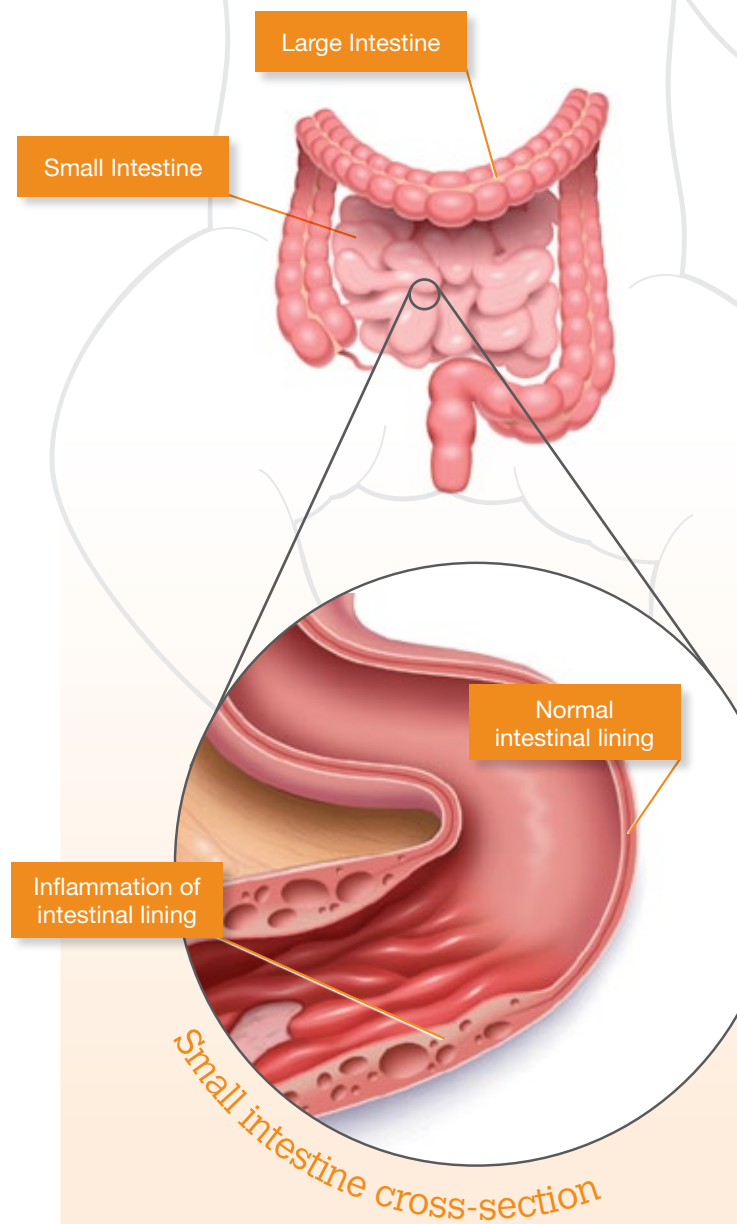
Symptoms of NEC may come on slowly or quickly.

They can include:

- Bloating
- Diarrhoea
- Low activity level
- Vomiting
- Blood in the stool
- Limited or no interest in eating
- Abnormal body temperature (can be too low or too high)

Is NEC life-threatening?

NEC is a serious disease, and it can be life-threatening. Early, aggressive treatment helps improve the chances of survival.



Treating Necrotising Enterocolitis

What treatment will my baby receive?

When NEC is suspected or diagnosed in a baby:

- Feedings by mouth are stopped
- A tube is placed into the baby's stomach to relieve gas pressure and remove fluids
- Fluids are delivered intravenously (through an IV)
- **Antibiotics** are given

How will I know how my baby is doing?

The NICU team will keep you up-to-date on your baby's progress. At first, babies with NEC receive X-rays and blood tests several times a day. As the baby gets better, these tests may become less frequent.

Will my baby need surgery?

Some babies with NEC will need surgery. This may happen if:

- There is a lot of damage to the intestine
- There are holes or tears (**perforations**) in the wall of the intestine
- If the baby has **peritonitis** (inflammation of the inner wall of the abdomen)
- If the baby is not getting better with non-surgical treatment

What will happen next?

The majority of babies will do well however each baby responds differently to treatment. Talk to your baby's healthcare team. They can answer any questions you have about your baby.

Glossary

Antibiotics

medicines that fight infections caused by bacteria

Chorioamnionitis

infection in the placenta and the fluid surrounding the baby

Blood exchange transfusion

process of slowly removing the baby's blood and replacing it with fresh donor blood

Bowel

word commonly used to describe the large and small intestines

Congenital

existing at birth

Enterocolitis

irritation of the intestines

Necrotising

causes tissue to break down

Peritonitis

inflammation of the wall of the abdomen

Perforation

hole or tear

Ask the healthcare team when you have questions – they are there to help.

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