

UNDERSTANDING Necrotizing Enterocolitis (NEC)

NEC



What is necrotizing enterocolitis?

The words **necrotizing 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 time between when the mother's water breaks and when the baby is delivered.)
- Low oxygen levels during birth
- **Congenital** heart disease. Congenital means existing at birth.
- **Blood exchange tranfusion**

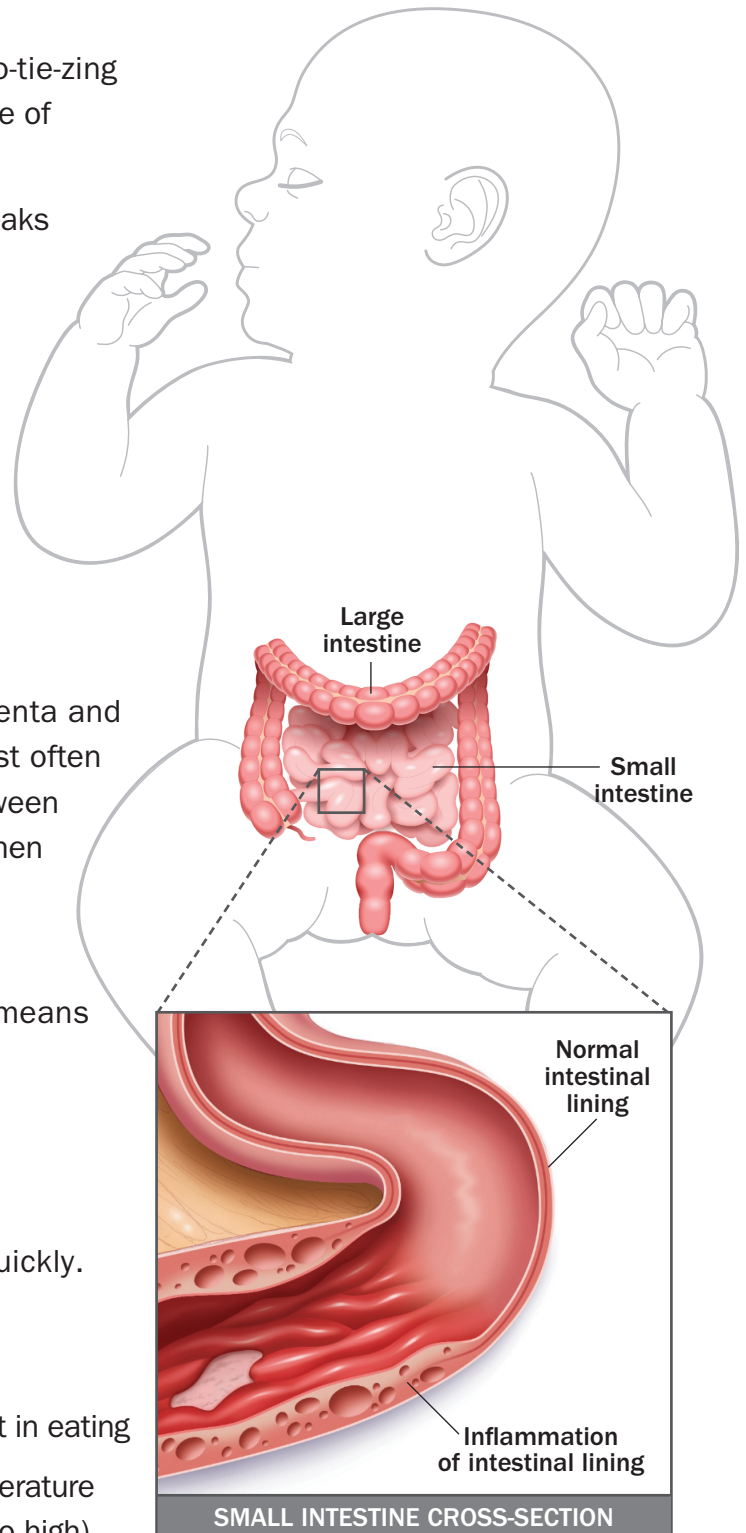
What are the symptoms of NEC?

Symptoms of NEC may come on slowly or quickly. They can include:

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

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 Necrotizing Enterocolitis

What treatment will my baby receive?

When NEC is suspected or diagnosed in a baby:

- Feedings by mouth are stopped
- A tube is inserted into the baby's stomach to relieve gas pressure
- 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 get 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?

Many babies respond well to treatment for NEC; however, each baby is different. Talk to your baby's health care team. They can answer any questions you have about your baby.

Glossary

Antibiotics – medicines that fight infections caused by bacteria

Chorioamnionitis
[kor-e-o-am-nee-o-ni-tis] – infection in the placenta and the fluid surrounding the baby

Blood exchange transfusions – 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

Necrotizing – causes tissue to break down

Peritonitis – inflammation of the wall of the abdomen

Perforation – hole or tear

Ask the health care team when you have questions—they are there to help.

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NOTES:
