



What is spontaneous intestinal perforation?

A **spontaneous intestinal perforation**, or SIP, is a small tear in part of the **digestive system** called the intestines. The tear is spontaneous, or isolated, because babies with SIP usually have no other problems with their digestive systems.

The SIP may allow some contents of the intestines to leak out into the **abdomen** (belly). This can cause irritation or an infection.

What are the symptoms of SIP?

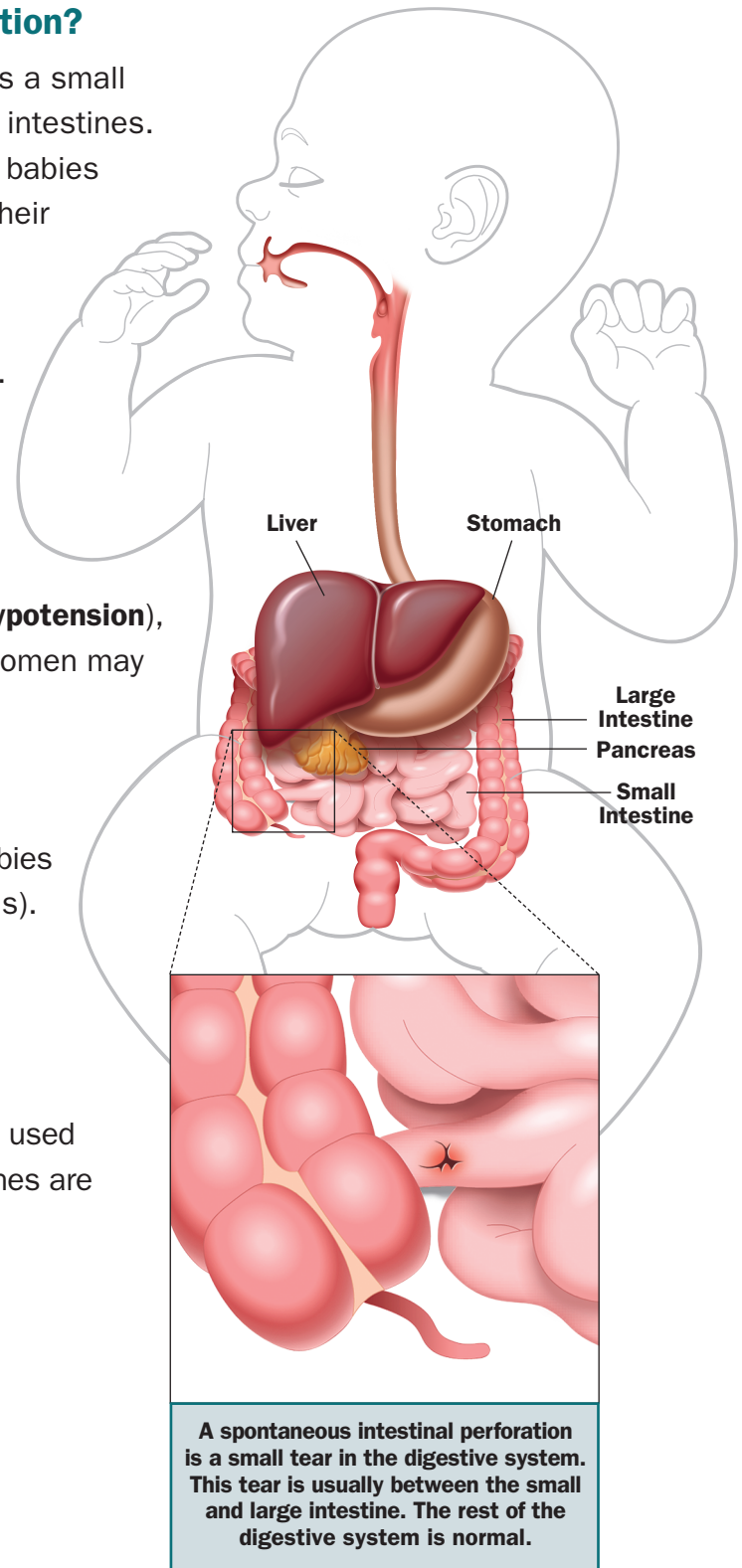
Babies with SIP often have swollen bellies (**abdominal distention**), low blood pressure (**hypotension**), and trouble breathing. In some cases, the abdomen may look a little gray or blue.

How common is SIP?

SIP occurs in fewer than 5 in 100 premature babies with very low birth weight (less than 3.5 pounds). SIP is uncommon in full-term babies or babies with normal birth weight.

How is SIP diagnosed?

In babies who have symptoms of SIP, X-rays are used to look for signs that the contents of the intestines are leaking into the abdomen.



Understanding Spontaneous Intestinal Perforation (continued)

How is SIP treated?

SIP is treated in two steps. First, the health care team tries to make the baby feel better. They may:

- Stop putting food or medicines into the baby's digestive system (by mouth or through a tube)
- Feed the baby and give medicines **intravenously** (through an IV)
- Use suction to release gas from the abdomen
- Use antibiotics to treat infections

Second, the health care team treats the SIP itself. There are 2 main types of treatment:

- **Peritoneal** drainage to remove fluid from the abdomen through a **drain**. The drain stays in place for several days. The goal is to give the tear time to heal itself.
- Surgery to fix the tear.

The choice of treatment depends on many factors. Talk to your health care team about the best treatment for your baby.

How will I know how my baby is doing?

The NICU team will keep you up-to-date on your baby's progress. It often takes several weeks for the intestines to heal before the baby can start eating by mouth.

What will happen next?

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

Glossary

Abdomen – belly

Abdominal distension – swollen belly

Digestive system – group of organs that process food. It includes the mouth, stomach, liver, pancreas, and intestines

Drain – a small plastic tube used to remove fluid

Intestinal – part of the digestive system

Intravenous – through a vein

Hypotension – low blood pressure

Perforation – small hole or tear

Peritoneal – relating to the thin layer of tissue that lines the abdomen

Spontaneous – does not have a known cause

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

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NOTES:
