

Developmental Dysplasia of the Hip (DDH)

Information and advice for parents and carers

Paediatric Physiotherapy

You have been given this leaflet because your baby is at risk of having developmental dysplasia of the hip (DDH) and requires further assessment. Most babies at risk of DDH have normal hips but it is important that we make sure.

What is developmental dysplasia of the hip (DDH)?

Developmental dysplasia of the hip (DDH) is a health problem where a baby's hips have not grown properly. The health problem affects around 1 in 100 babies. DDH can happen in one or both hips.

In a normal hip the head of the thigh bone (femur) is held tightly in place sitting in a socket. In DDH the head of the thigh bone is not held tightly in place and the socket may be flatter than usual. This makes the joint less stable. Making it easy for the head of the thigh bone to move in and out of the socket and become dislocated.

What causes DDH?

The cause of DDH is not clear but the following babies are more at risk:

- Those who have a close relative with DDH or hip problems as a baby.
- Babies in the breech position (feet down position) during pregnancy.
- Babies with significant foot deformities that need treatment.
- Babies who have significant newborn torticollis/wryneck (where the head is tilted to one side and turned towards the other).
- Babies who have a significant flattening of one side of their head.

What are the symptoms of DDH?

DDH is not painful and there are no definite signs, but you may see the following:

- One leg appears shorter than the other.
- One leg moves differently from the other and the knee may appear to face outwards.
- When you change your baby's nappy one leg does not seem to move outwards as fully as the other.

How is DDH diagnosed?

All babies have a physical exam soon after they are born. This includes an exam of their hip joints. For the exam the baby is laid on their back. Their hips will be gently moved. The exam is checking for stability of the hips. If your baby's hips make a 'clicky' sound this can be entirely normal. Your health professional will tell you the results

What happens next?

If your baby's hips are unstable

Your baby will have hip scan if their hips are unstable on review or they have one of the risk factors. The scan will happen when they are 4-6 weeks old. The ultrasound scan is painless. It is similar to the scan you had to see your baby during pregnancy. If the scan shows DDH, you will be referred to a specialist physiotherapist. Treatment often starts within a few days of DDH being found. Treatment for DDH will only start once it is confirmed on a scan. This is why it is very important to attend your scan as planned.

If your baby's hips are stable, but they are more at risk of DDH

A routine hip ultrasound scan will be arranged for when your baby is about 6 weeks old. After the scan you will be sent a letter telling you the results. Most of these scans are normal, but if there is a problem your baby will be referred to the specialist physiotherapist and orthopaedic consultant. It is important that you bring your baby for the scan as the signs of DDH can be very subtle.

How is DDH treated?

For babies under 6 months old they will be fitted into a harness. The harness helps to remould the hip joint into the correct shape. You will not be able to take the harness off. Treatment is often less complex the earlier it is started. In complex cases different treatment may be needed.

Treatment with harness stops once a repeat scan shows DDH has improved. The length of time your baby will be in the harness for will vary. Some babies do not improve with harness and need different treatment.

Your physiotherapist will teach you how to care for your baby in harness. Do not bath your baby with the harness on. You will be able to change your baby's nappy as normal.

Whilst they are in the harness, your baby will have regular check ups. At these check ups, we will change the harness and give you time to bathe your baby.

Due to staff allergies we ask that you do not use any nut-based skin products on your babies skin prior to or during the physiotherapy appointment.

What are the benefits of wearing the harness?

Wearing the harness helps your baby's hip joint slowly change into the right shape. This will make the hip more stable.

What are the risks of wearing the harness?

The harness may rub your baby's skin and there is a small risk of damage to blood vessels or nerves. Your baby will have regular appointments to check on these potential problems.

What are the risks of not getting treatment?

Some unstable hips can improve within the first few weeks after birth. This is why the scan isn't done until your baby is 4-6 weeks old. However, if your baby has DDH and does not have treatment their hip joint will stay misshapen for their lifetime. This may cause them problems with walking and pain. If DDH is not treated early with the harness, your baby can have hip problems later in life and might need surgery.

Are there any alternatives to this treatment?

Depending on your baby's condition, a plaster of Paris cast and surgery are other treatment options. If these treatments are appropriate for your baby, they will be discussed with you by a doctor.

Symptoms to report

If you notice your baby has any of the following, please contact their physiotherapist as soon as possible:

- Areas of broken skin.
- Areas of redness, rubbing or rashes on the skin.
- The harness becomes very tight.
- A growth spurt (this can cause the harness to become too small).
- Your baby seems upset for prolonged periods of time without any other explanation.
- Your baby is not moving their legs.
- Your babies toes are cold, miscoloured or blood flow is poor. You will be taught how to check the blood flow.

Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns you can contact:

Paediatric Physiotherapists

0121 507 4486 (option 1)

Monday – Friday, 8.00am – 4.00pm

Further information

NHS Website

Developmental dysplasia of the hip

Website: www.nhs.uk/conditions/developmental-dysplasia-of-the-hip/

International Hip Dysplasia Institute

Website: <https://hipdysplasia.org/>

STEPS

A leading charity supporting families affected by a lower limb conditions

Website: www.stepsworldwide.org/

(Websites accessed 19 March 2024).

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- Committee on Quality Improvement, Subcommittee on Developmental Dysplasia of the Hip (2000). Clinical Practice Guideline: Early Detection of Developmental Dysplasia of the Hip. Pediatrics; 105 (4): 896–905.
- Patient (2022). Developmental dysplasia of the hip DDH. [Online] Available at: <https://patient.info/doctor/developmental-dysplasia-of-the-hip-pro> (Accessed 19 March 2024).
- STEPS (2022). Baby hip health: the parents guide. [Online] Available at: <https://www.stepsworldwide.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Baby-Hip-Health-website.pdf> (Accessed 19 March 2024).

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