Intraventricular Hemorrhage in Premature Infants

Some premature babies have bleeding in the brain the first week after birth. This bleeding is called intraventricular hemorrhage.

Your doctor may describe the amount of bleeding as grades 1 through 4. Grade 1 or 2 means the amount of bleeding in the brain is small. Less bleeding means there is a much lower chance of brain damage.

More bleeding (grades 3 and 4) raises the risk that fluid will build up in the brain. This is called hydrocephalus. The extra fluid can increase pressure in the baby's brain. This may cause brain damage. It can also cause mental and physical problems.

What can you expect if your baby has this problem?

- Your baby will be cared for in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). Most babies stay in the hospital for at least 4 weeks.
- The doctor will use several ultrasound tests to closely watch for signs that bleeding is getting worse. These tests can also check for fluid buildup in your baby's brain.

How is it treated?

- There is no treatment to stop this type of bleeding in the brain.
- Instead, the focus of treatment will be to keep the blood pressure steady, give fluids, and help your baby breathe.
- If hydrocephalus develops, your baby may have a lumbar puncture, receive medicines, or have a procedure to place a shunt. A shunt is a flexible tube placed in the brain to drain the fluid. Draining fluid helps control the pressure in the brain.
- Your baby may have more tests to check for swelling and fluid buildup.

Follow-up care is a key part of your child's treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if your child is having problems. It's also a good idea to know your child's test results and keep a list of the medicines your child takes.