



Pain relief for newborns

A new policy statement from the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) addresses how to tell whether a newborn is experiencing pain and how to provide relief. According to the statement, behavioural indicators of pain include facial expressions, body movements, and crying. Physiologic indicators include changes in heart rate, respiratory rate, and blood pressure.

According to the statement, health care institutions should develop and implement policies to assess, prevent, and manage infants' pain. Appropriate measures and tools for these activities should be used consistently. Pain relief should be administered in the least painful way. For minor procedures, simple comfort measures, such as swaddling, offering a pacifier, and positioning should be used whenever possible.

The statement presents specific methods for relieving pain and stress and says that health professionals need to recognize several important newborn pain management concepts, such as:

- exposure to prolonged or severe pain might increase neonatal morbidity;
- infants who experienced pain before 1 month old respond differently to subsequent painful events; and
- a lack of behavioural responses does not necessarily mean a lack of pain.

The statement recommends that the risks and benefits of pain management techniques be considered on an individual basis, and that the medical environment be as conducive as possible to the well-being of babies and their families.

For more information on the CPS-AAP statement, contact Elizabeth Moreau at (613) 526-9397, extension 231.