

# RECOGNISING IMPAIRMENTS AT BIRTH

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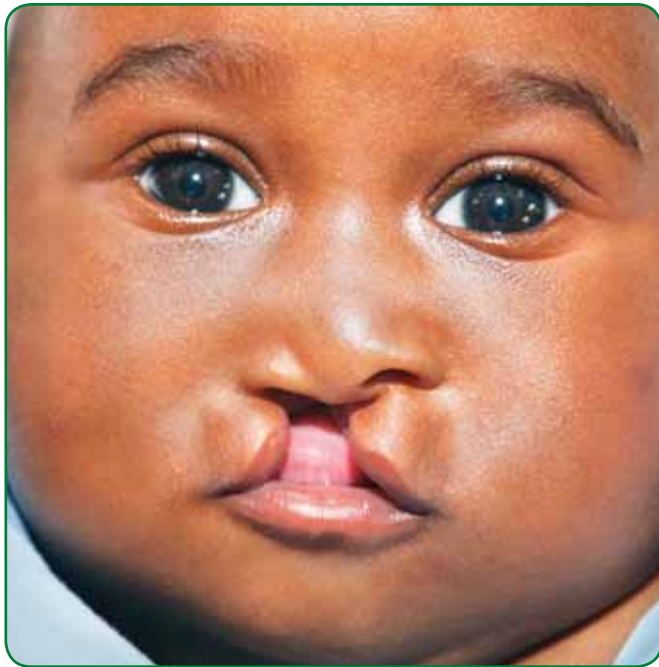


# About impairments at birth

- They can happen to babies all around the world.
- They mostly occur when the baby is being formed very early in pregnancy.
- Impairments are NOT caused by witchcraft.
- They are NOT caused by a curse.
- They are NOT the fault of the mother and do NOT occur because the mother did something wrong.

# About impairments at birth

Cleft Lip



Clubfoot



Cataract



# Occulo-cutaneous albinism (Albino)

- The baby's skin has no pigment so it looks white.
- The hair also has no pigment and is white.
- Babies with albinism have problems with their eyes.
- Babies with albinism should have regular eye examinations.
- The skin of babies with albinism is damaged easily by the sun. All albino babies should be protected from the sun by wearing clothes and covering their heads.
- Babies with albinism have standard intelligence and grow like other children.
- Children with albinism have the same rights as other children to receive attention, food, schooling, and participate in play.

# Occulo-cutaneous albinism (Albino)



# Hydrocephalus

- Hydrocephalus causes the head to be too big and soft. Does the baby's head look too big?
- The eyes may look like the "setting sun".
- The baby should be taken immediately to a special hospital for surgery to insert a shunt to drain the excess fluid.
- Hydrocephalus should be treated urgently to prevent brain damage.
- The baby should be seen at a rehabilitation centre to get (physio)therapy.
- The nearest hospital for treating babies with hydrocephalus is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Children with hydrocephalus have the same rights as other children to receive attention, food, schooling, and participate in play.

# Hydrocephalus

Baby with hydrocephalus  
(photo: CURE International)



“Setting sun” sign: the eyes  
are directed downward  
(photo: Bryce Flurie)

Baby after shunt operation



Happy child with controlled  
hydrocephalus

# Cleft lip and palate

- Cleft lip/palate is a common impairment.
- A cleft is a gap in the skin of the upper lip that extends to the base of the nose.
- Sometimes the palate has a cleft but the lip is intact.
- Every newborn should be examined for cleft lip and palate.
- Look in the mouth and feel for cleft palate with a clean finger.
- Clefts can be repaired by surgery.
- Refer the baby as soon as possible to a specialised hospital performing this type of surgery.

## Feeding

- Babies with cleft lip and palate have difficulty feeding.
- Breast milk is best.
- Feed more often per day.
- Keep the baby upright when feeding.
- If the baby has problems sucking, express breast milk and give it with a spoon.
- Wind/burp the baby more often.
- Give infant food or boiled cow's milk if there is not enough breast milk.



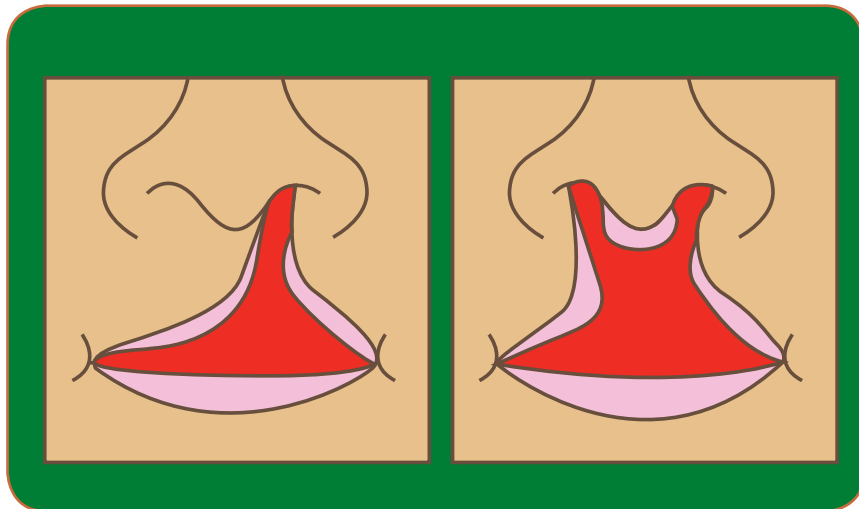
# Cleft lip and palate



Cleft lip and palate before surgery



After surgery



A cleft can be one side or two



A child with untreated cleft lip

# Brachial plexus injury

- Brachial plexus injury occurs during difficult delivery when the head or arm needs to be pulled hard.
- The nerves between the neck and the arm, the brachial plexus, become stretched too much causing partial paralysis of the arm.
- The baby holds one arm at the side, with the elbow straight and the fingers clenched.
- The arm does not move like the other one when the baby is stimulated.
- The hand may still move.
- Sometimes the baby seems in pain when moved during the first few days.
- Recovery often occurs, but it may take many months. Sometimes there is permanent impairment.
- Send the baby to a physiotherapist for passive movements and stimulation.
- Look carefully for brachial plexus injury in any baby who has had a difficult delivery.

# Brachial plexus injury



The arm does not move like the other one when the baby is stimulated.

# Cataract

- Check the baby's eyes.
- The pupil should look black.
- Shine a torch into the eye.
- If there is a cataract the pupil looks white or cloudy.
- Cataract can cause blindness.
- Refer the baby immediately to an eye hospital.
- The nearest eye hospital is \_\_\_\_\_.
- A small operation can cure cataract.

# Cataract



If the pupil looks white or cloudy it could be cataract



Check the eye with a torch

# Impairments of the fingers and toes

- Are there the proper number of fingers and toes? An extra finger or toe is called “polydactyly”.
- Is the shape of the finger or toe normal?
- Are the fingers or toes joined together? This is called “syndactyly”.
- Most finger and toe impairments do not cause serious loss of function, but can cause embarrassment and result in discrimination.
- These impairments and loss of function can be improved by surgery.

# Impairments of the fingers and toes



# Limb impairments

- Babies can be born with part of a limb missing.
- The limb can be shortened or impaired.
- Do the baby's limbs move normally?
- Babies with a lot of joint stiffness have a condition known as arthrogryposis.
- Children with limb impairments can be helped at specialised rehabilitation centres.



# Limb impairments



Arthrogryposis

# Clubfoot

- Clubfoot can be treated.
- If it is left alone there is severe impairment and children walk on the side of their foot.
- Babies with clubfoot should be referred as soon as possible to a clubfoot clinic.
- The nearest clubfoot clinic is \_\_\_\_\_
- Treatment with casts can result in a normal foot and normal function.

# Clubfoot



Clubfoot



Treated with casts



Regular follow-up with special foot abductor brace is required



Untreated clubfoot leads to severe impairment

# Dislocation (developmental) of the hip

- In this condition, the baby's hip joint is unstable and dislocates when the legs are brought together.
- It is more common in babies born breech.
- It is difficult to see. The leg may look shorter and have an extra crease.
- An examination is necessary for detection.
- The legs are first bent up to the bottom. Check if one looks shorter than the other.
- Then the legs are gently moved to the side. A shift or "clunk" is felt as the hip goes in and out of the joint.
- Carrying a baby on your back or side, Africa style, helps to correct hip dislocations.

# Dislocation (developmental) of the hip



The left leg looks short and there is an extra crease.



First bring the legs together. Is one shorter than the other?



Then move the legs gently back and forwards.



Feel for the hip moving in and out of the joint.

# Spina bifida

- Check the baby's back. If there is a large bulge, a sore, or even an unusual hairy patch, the baby has spina bifida.
- Spina bifida is a serious problem. It is caused when the baby's back does not close properly during development in the womb.
- There is damage to the spinal cord and there may be paralysis of the legs and incontinence.
- Often these babies also have hydrocephalus.
- Babies with spina bifida can die easily from infection.
- Treatment is very difficult.
- When the damage to the spinal cord is severe, the child needs to use a wheelchair.
- When the damage is mild, the child may still be able to walk with assistance (crutches and/or braces).
- The nearest hospital for treating babies with spina bifida is \_\_\_\_\_.

# Spina bifida



Bulge on baby's back

# Problems of the genitals and anus

- Examine the genitals and anus of a newborn carefully.
- Do they look normal?
- Bladder exstrophy is where the hole for the urine is on the abdomen.
- Hypospadias is where the hole for urine (urethra) is below where it should be.
- If the testicles look large the baby may have a hernia or hydrocoele.
- These problems can be fixed by surgery.
- Is there a hole for the anus and has the baby passed meconium? Then, the baby may have an imperforate anus.
- Imperforate anus must be corrected by urgent surgery.
- Refer the child immediately to the referral hospital.



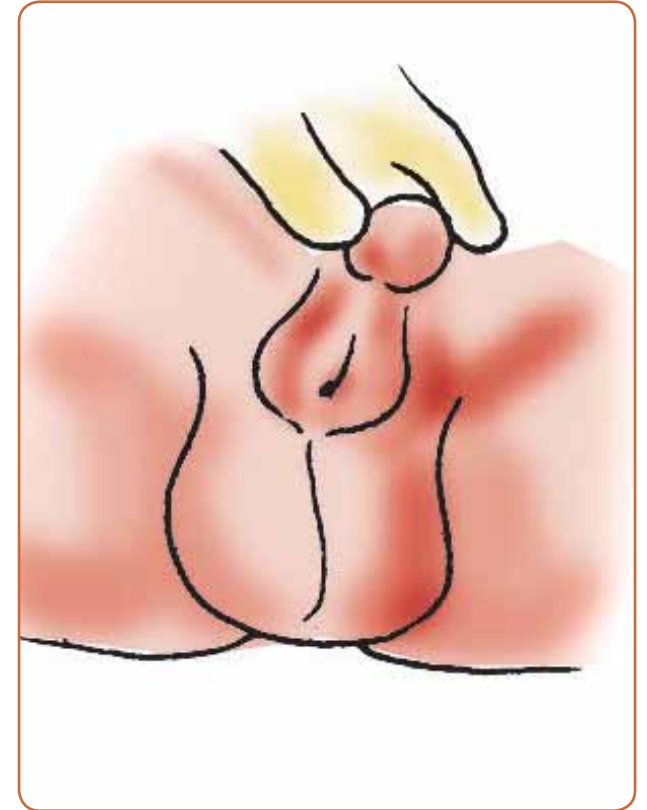
# Problems of the genitals and anus



Bladder exstrophy



Imperforate anus



Hypospadias

# Examining newborns for impairments

1. Look at the baby's colour, skin and temperature – are they all normal?
2. Is the baby's head big or very small?
3. Does the neck move fully?
4. Shine a light in the baby's eyes – does the pupil look white or cloudy?
5. Put your sterile finger inside the baby's mouth to check for cleft palate.
6. Look at the baby's arms/hands and legs/feet – do they look normal? Do the joints have normal range of motion?? Are they flexible? Are there five fingers and five toes?
7. Feel the baby's arms and legs – are they strong?
8. Look at the baby's back – are there any sores, marks or hairy patches on the spine?
9. Look at the baby's anus and genitals – is the hole for urine in the correct place?  
Is the anus normal?

# Examining newborns for impairments



# RECOGNISING IMPAIRMENTS AT BIRTH

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