Hypocalcemia, Low Calcium Level, Infants

Hypocalcemia means the calcium level in the blood is low. Calcium is a mineral in the body that is important for the function of:

- Heart and muscle
- Cells
- Nerves
- Bone structure
- Blood clotting

There are two kinds of hypocalcemia in infants:

1. Early hypocalcemia happens in the first few days of life. This early type is usually a temporary problem that is easily treated.
2. Late hypocalcemia shows up after the first few days of life.

CAUSES

Early hypocalcemia can be seen in:

- Premature infants
- Babies born to diabetic mothers
- Babies ill with infection, breathing problems, etc.
- Babies stressed at birth
- Babies born to mothers with hyperparathyroidism or other problems that can affect blood calcium levels

There are several diseases that can cause **late** hypocalcemia. They are uncommon or rare. These diseases may not be temporary. Some of these rare problems include:

- Hypoparathyroidism. The small parathyroid glands in the neck control Vitamin D metabolism. If these glands do not work as they are supposed to, this can cause low calcium levels in a baby.
- Vitamin D. Problems in the liver can affect how Vitamin D is used. If this happens, this can cause low calcium levels in a baby.
- Intestinal problem. A few rare intestinal problems can make it hard for a baby to absorb Vitamin D and/or calcium from the intestines. This can lead to low levels of calcium in the blood.

SYMPTOMS

Babies with early hypocalcemia often show no signs. Others may show:

- Shakiness or jerky movements
- Seizures
- Noisy or difficult breathing.
- Vomiting.
- Belly can look bloated or distended.

DIAGNOSIS

Low calcium is diagnosed with a blood test. If your caregiver is concerned about **late** hypocalcemia or another problem, other blood tests and urine tests may be needed.

TREATMENT

The treatment will depend on what the cause of the low calcium is. Your caregiver will discuss these problems with you. Treatment of low calcium that is temporary may include:

- Early feeding.
- Supplemental calcium – intravenous (IV or in a vein).
- Oral calcium supplements.

For **late** hypocalcemia, treatment will vary depending upon the specific cause. Your caregiver will talk to you about the details of any problem found and what would be recommended for treatment.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Feed your baby as instructed by your child's caregiver.
- Continue any prescribed medicine as directed.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your baby has poor appetite.
- Your baby is jittery or shaky.
- Your baby is unusually irritable.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your baby has a convulsion.
- Breathing distress. Watch for:
  - Rapid breathing
  - Sucking in of the spaces between or under the ribs.
  - High pitch noise when breathing in (*stridor*) or out (*wheezing*).
- Repeated vomiting.

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