

If you stay during the check

If you stay during the check, talk to your baby. Your voice is calming. Steadily and gently hold their body and legs.

You can also spend time with your baby before or after the check. You can do some things you know your baby likes, e.g. hold their hand, cuddle them, or give a baby massage. Ask the therapy team if you want to learn baby massage.

If you stay during the check, the room will be dark. Doctors will move around the cot. You might hear medical words. Your baby might cry or look upset. Their eyes may look red or puffy after, but this goes away. If you feel unwell or overwhelmed during the check, then please tell the team.

Want to know more?

Ask any member of the team if you have questions. You can also visit the charity Bliss for more help and advice: www.bliss.org.uk

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Information on retinopathy of prematurity (ROP)



Eye checks for
premature babies
what you need
to know

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When your baby is in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), they might need an eye check called ROP screening. This leaflet explains what it is and how you can help.

What is ROP?

ROP stands for retinopathy of prematurity. It's an eye problem that can happen in babies born early. Blood vessels in the eyes of premature babies are not fully developed. They may begin to grow abnormally. If left untreated, this can cause damage to the eye.

Not all early babies get ROP. It is more likely in babies who were born before 32 weeks, who had a lower birth weight, or who needed oxygen treatment.

Most babies with ROP get better without any treatment. If your baby needs treatment, the doctors will explain everything to you.

Why are ROP eye checks needed?

Doctors check for ROP to keep your baby's eyes safe. These checks are the only way to spot any problems early and to start treatment at the right time (if treatment is needed). If ROP isn't found in time, it can cause serious damage to the eyes. This can lead to blindness.

When will the eye checks happen?

The first eye check usually happens when your baby is about 4 to 5 weeks old. Some babies only need one check. Others may need more regular checks (every one to two weeks or less frequently). Some babies will still need eye checks after going home. These will be done at the NICU. Some children may continue to need eye checks as they grow older.

What happens during the eye check?

Your baby gets eye drops to make their pupils bigger. They also get medicine to help with pain. A special eye doctor (called an ophthalmologist) looks inside the eyes using special tools. The doctor may move the eye so they can check all areas. The check will only last for a short time. The procedure can cause discomfort for your baby. This can be reduced by wrapping them and having a parent present.

Your baby may seem unsettled for a few hours after their check. You may see their heart rate go up, more pauses in their breathing, or some difficulties feeding.

After the check, your baby should stay in a dark room and avoid bright lights for the rest of the day. You'll get the results after the check and the team may book another appointment.

Is It safe?

Yes, the eye check might feel uncomfortable, but it is not harmful to your baby. It helps doctors make sure your baby's eyes are growing well. If checks aren't done, eye problems might be missed.

Do I need to be there?

You can choose to be there or not. Some parents stay to support their baby during the check. Others help before or after the check. There's no right or wrong choice. It is important to know that the examination can look uncomfortable and it can be upsetting to watch.

If you want to be there, the team will let you know when the check is happening. If you can't be there, that's okay too. Your baby will be looked after with care. During the check, your baby will be wrapped gently. They will be spoken to softly, given a dummy, and cuddled after the check. If you would like more information to help you make your decision, please let the team know.