



Collodion Baby

All parents hope that their new born baby will be entirely normal. Words can not easily express the initial distress and shock of being told you have a collodion baby especially as parents receive little information about the condition in the first few days after birth. This sheet attempts to provide such information:

What is a collodion baby?

This is a medical term used by doctors to describe the appearance of a new born baby who appears to have an “extra skin”. It is a descriptive term not a specific diagnosis or disorder. Parents often describe the appearance as;

- being like an extra skin
- having a sausage-like skin on the outside
- a shiny film looking like I had just covered my child in vaseline

Parents may notice that the eyelids and lips have a forced open appearance due to the tightness of the skin.

When will I know if I have a collodion baby?

This skin condition is rarely predicted during pregnancy.

Stage 1

The problem appears at the time of birth. The first thing that usually confronts the parents is either a doctor or midwife explaining that something is wrong and actually seeing the



baby themselves with abnormal looking skin. Because the condition is so rare, it is not unusual for the medical personnel attending the birth to have little knowledge of the condition. Parents who have been through such an experience often say they were told “their baby is abnormal but we are not sure what is wrong.” To know that something is wrong but to have no idea what is wrong can be very distressing in the early stages.

Stage 2

A collodion baby will have to be nursed in a humidified incubator in the first few days of life which can further increase the sense of isolation that parents may feel. During this time it is likely that you will meet a number of other doctors, which can be somewhat bewildering. A children’s doctor (paediatrician) will arrive soon after the birth to look after your child and take over their care from the midwife or obstetrician (doctor involved in the pregnancy and delivery).

Stage 3

Depending on the level of expertise at your local hospital it is likely that you will see a dermatologist (skin specialist) within the first few days. Even dermatologists do not see this condition very frequently and they may choose to refer you on to a specialist paediatric dermatologist for assessment if they are not locally available.

What are the risks of being a collodion baby?

The baby can lose heat and fluid through the abnormal skin. This is easily avoided by applying a moisturiser to the skin. The condition is not thought to be painful or distressing to the child.

What happens to this extra skin?

The outer skin layer will shed off on its own within the first few days of life. Occasionally this process takes 1-2 weeks.

Then what is going to happen to my baby?

After the collodion skin is shed off the following possibilities can occur:

- Normal skin
- Abnormal scaling of the skin develops (called ichthyosis)
 - Lamellar ichthyosis (generalised)
 - Non-bullous ichthyosiform erythroderma
 - Limited lamellar ichthyosis
- Other ichthyosiform syndromes (very rare)

It is frustrating that we can’t predict which of the above events will happen in the first few days of life. It is important that your doctor monitors the situation closely and deals with any problems if and when they arise.

What causes a collodion skin?

We do not know the exact cause but there appears to be an inherited or genetic abnormality in normal skin shedding.

Are there likely to be any internal problems with my baby?

No, in the vast majority of cases the problem is confined to the skin.