

# Necrotizing Enterocolitis (NEC)

A serious disease that affects the intestine (gut).

**Premature and low birthweight babies are at higher risk.**  
**Here's what you need to know:**



nathan dumlao/unsplash

## What is NEC?

A condition where a portion or all of the baby's intestine becomes inflamed (enterocolitis) and, in severe cases, the intestinal tissue starts to die (necrosis).

**Diagnosis includes:** • NEC symptoms • blood tests • x-rays or ultrasound of the gut

## What causes NEC?

The exact cause is not known, but several factors may contribute. The immature immune system may not be able to protect the intestine from bad bacteria. Other causes may include low intestinal oxygen levels or poor blood flow. NEC can be life-threatening if the intestinal tissue dies or if bad bacteria leaks outside the intestine or into blood stream. Surgery may be needed in severe cases or if a baby does not improve with treatment.

We do know that NEC is less common in babies fed human/breast milk and that probiotics may help to reduce the risk.

**Treatment includes:** • stopping feeding • giving nutrition by intravenous (IV) • using antibiotics

## What can you do?



**Continue to pump and freeze your milk.**



**Talk to your baby's care team about how to stay involved in the care and comfort of your baby.**



**Join the CPBF peer support group on our website.**

### Possible signs of NEC

- swollen, tender, red, grey or blue abdomen
- increased spit ups/vomiting
- bright green vomit
- black, bloody stools
- pauses in breathing
- less active
- difficulty feeding
- low or fluctuating body temperature



Visit us online for more resources  
[canadianpreemies.org](https://canadianpreemies.org)

**CPBF**  Canadian Premature Babies Foundation