

Major feeding trial will improve long-term health of premature babies

July 22 2015, by Charlotte Anscombe



A national research project that will improve the long-term health of premature babies has met its recruitment target nearly a year early.

The Speed of Increasing Milk Feeds Trial (SIFT), which is being led by Dr Jon Dorling, from The University of Nottingham, has recruited 2,800 babies 11 months ahead of schedule. The final baby was recruited by clinicians at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust.

Babies from 60 neonatal units across the UK have been recruited by the SIFT over 25 months, and scientists have looked at the best way to feed these premature infants in order to keep them healthy both short term and in later life. The trial has been funded by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR).

Long-term health

The number of premature babies which survive has greatly increased over the years, and so the aim of clinicians now is to improve the outlook for them and to avoid serious complications. The way babies are fed in early life affects short and long-term health and survival.

Premature babies are not able to digest large volumes of milk straight away, so until they have matured, nutrition is provided through an intravenous drip and the amount of milk given is gradually increased with time. Increasing the milk quickly may lead to problems with the stomach, but increasing the milk slowly means there is an increased risk of infection because the drip is needed for longer. The SIFT is the first study of its kind which has looked at the best way to balance these risks.

During the SIFT, researchers compared two rates of feeding - 'slowly' and 'quickly' and then looked at whether either rate gave a better outcome by measuring a variety of issues, including infection, bowel problems, growth and long term physical and mental development.

Preventing infection

Dr Jon Dorling, Clinical Associate Professor at The University of Nottingham and Honorary Consultant Neonatologist at NUH, led the national study. He said: "Now that we have recruited the babies to the study we look forward to comparing how they have done.

"We really hope and expect that this large study will tell whether or not we can safely give babies [milk](#) quicker. If we can, we may be able to prevent infection and shorten the time babies have to spend in hospital. This could also potentially save the NHS millions of pounds in shorter term care for [premature babies](#)."

One of the babies recruited to the study is Eli Hannon. Eli, born on 25 June 2015 at Nottingham City Hospital, was the 112th baby from NUH to be recruited onto the trial.

Eli was born at 29 weeks, weighing just 3lbs 8ozs. He was transferred to the Neonatal Unit at Nottingham City Hospital where his parents Kelly Hannon and Richard Murray, from Basford in Nottingham, were asked by doctors if Eli could take part in the research trial. Richard said: "After reading the literature we were given and asking lots of questions we both felt there was no risk for Eli and agreed for him to take part in the trial.

"I would urge other families where possible to get involved with research studies. Make sure you read all the literature and ask as many questions as you can, but at the end of the day we all have a moral obligation to help others, especially children and young babies. If Eli's involvement in this trial is going to help other [babies](#) in his situation then I think that can only be a good thing."

Provided by University of Nottingham

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