

Oral Sucrose for Short-Term Pain Relief

What is oral sucrose?

Oral sucrose is concentrated sugar water. Infants receive it in their mouth during short procedures in the hospital. This helps relieve pain.

When is oral sucrose used?

Oral sucrose helps reduce pain during short procedures, such as immunizations (shots) or other injections, drawing blood from a vein, receiving an IV, putting in or taking out a urinary catheter, suctioning, changing a bandage, or caring for a wound.

If the procedure is more painful, stronger medicines can be used along with oral sucrose. Examples of more painful procedures include putting in or taking out a chest tube, a spinal tap (lumbar puncture), or circumcision.

Which infants can be helped with oral sucrose?

Oral sucrose is helpful for most infants, even premature infants.

Who should not receive oral sucrose?

Oral sucrose should not be given to sedated or paralyzed infants. Do not use oral sucrose if the doctor or nurse lists your baby as **NPO**. (NPO is a medical term that means “nothing by mouth,” including food or liquids).

If your baby has one of the following issues, your baby's doctor will decide if your baby can receive oral sucrose:

- Is less than 32 weeks gestation
- Has a heart defect that hasn't been fixed
- Had birth asphyxia
- Has unstable blood sugar (glucose) level
- Cannot take feedings by mouth
- Is at risk to aspirate (get liquid in the lungs)



When should oral sucrose not be used?

Do not use oral sucrose:

- To encourage a child to latch onto a nipple.
- To calm or soothe fussy babies who do not have pain.
- If the infant needs pain control for longer than the procedure. In this case, a medicine that lasts longer should be used.

How do infants respond to oral sucrose?

From research, we know that babies who use oral sucrose cry for a shorter time after a painful event. They also calm down more quickly than babies who do not receive oral sucrose.

How is oral sucrose given?

One to two minutes before the painful event, your baby will receive drops of oral sucrose on their tongue. A pacifier could be used to suck on, if desired. Oral sucrose can be repeated once during the painful event or after the painful event if needed.

How do I prepare my child?

You can increase your infant’s comfort by doing the following:

- **For the youngest infants:** try swaddling, comfort positioning, dimming the lights, and skin-to-skin contact when holding your infant.
- **For your older infant:** try comfort positioning, eye contact, talking softly, soft singing or music, or a favorite blanket or toy. Just before the procedure starts, let them explore and touch the medical equipment while you watch. For example, if your infant is receiving an injection, allow them to hold a syringe without a needle.

If your baby will have a feeding tube placed, allow them to hold the tube. You can also say simple one or two word phrases to describe the event, such as “owie,” “tube,” or “bandage off.”

During and after the painful event your infant will taste the sweet solution. The pacifier will help your baby suck, which is a calming activity for infants. Oral sucrose may not prevent your infant from crying, but it can decrease crying time and help them calm down quicker after the painful event. If you will reuse the pacifier, rinse it off with soap and water.

Are there complications or side effects from oral sucrose?

If used properly, there are very few side effects or complications from oral sucrose. Make sure your infant can swallow safely. Oral sucrose may not be right for all infants. Your nurse or doctor can help you decide.

What do I need to do at home?

If your baby will have short-term painful events at home, ask your healthcare provider if you can use oral sucrose at home. Ask the healthcare provider for the correct amount for your infant. The amount of oral sucrose used can vary from 1 or 2 drops for young infants, to 10 drops for older infants.

Do not use oral sucrose to calm your baby or help them fall asleep. It should only be used when having a painful procedure. **If you use oral sucrose incorrectly, it may not work when your baby really needs it.**

What if I have more questions?

If you have any questions or concerns about oral sucrose, please talk to you healthcare provider.

Questions for my doctor