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Cord cutting delay benefits preterm babies

Source: *The Cochrane Library* 2004; Not yet available online

A brief delay before cutting the umbilical cord of preterm babies appears to improve adjustment of the newborns to their surroundings.

The results of a recent Cochrane review suggest that waiting for 30 seconds to 2 minutes after a preterm birth before cutting the umbilical cord may reduce the risk of bleeding in the newborn's brain.

"Delaying cord clamping for just a very short time helped the babies to adjust to their new surroundings better," says lead author Heike Rabe from Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals in England.

The team conducted a systematic review of seven studies, encompassing a total of 297 preterm babies. They analyzed the influence of the time of cord cutting on blood pressure, red blood cell count, blood volume, bleeding within the brain, and the need for transfusion in the newborn.

As well as a reduced chance of bleeding within the brain, delaying the clamping of the umbilical cord reduced the need for transfusion and the incidence of anemia in the newborn babies, while also increasing their blood pressure and blood volume.

"If the cord is left unclamped for a short time after the birth, some of the baby's blood from the placenta passes to the baby to help the flow of the blood to the baby's lungs," says Rabe.

Tonse N. K. Raju, from the National Institute of Child Health and Development in Bethesda, Maryland, commented: "I'm comfortable with the 30-second delay, but there are so many things that can happen with a preterm infant that doctors have to use their judgment in each case."

Posted: 19 October 2004