You have been given this information leaflet because your baby may need to have a head scan. This will help you understand what a head scan is for and the reasons why your baby needs this.

**Why is my baby having a head scan?**

The scan will check for bleeding into the brain, structural brain problems, infection, and any unusual increase in head size.

**Are there any risks or side effects?**

There are no known risks or side effects of the scan. The scan will be performed externally and will not cause any discomfort to your baby.

**How is a head scan performed?**

An ultrasound scan is performed by a sonographer, using the same machine that is used for pregnancy scans. The ultrasound machine has a small hand held device called a transducer which is connected to a computer and a monitor. Lubricating gel is placed onto the soft spot on the top of your baby’s head, this allows the transducer to move smoothly over the surface of the skin and ensures continuous contact with the skin. A probe in the transducer transmits a pulse of high frequency sound. The sound waves which are reflected are then shown as a picture of your baby’s brain on the monitor. A photograph of the brain and ventricles through which the cerebrospinal fluid flows will be taken.

**How will I get the results?**

The pictures are recorded, printed and a report written and filed in your baby’s medical notes. The medical team will inform you about the results of your baby’s head scan. They will also inform you whether further head scans will be required to monitor your baby’s condition and when these will be performed.

**What do the results mean?**

**IVH**

The most common problem seen on the head scan of premature babies is an IVH. IVH stands for Intraventricular Haemorrhage. This is bleeding into ventricles inside the brain. There is no specific treatment that has been found to help babies who have an IVH. Head scans will be performed routinely to monitor the IVH as it can cause swelling of the ventricles within the brain. This is called Hydrocephalus.

**Hydrocephalus**

Hydrocephalus is a condition where there is a build-up of cerebrospinal fluid on the brain. The excess fluid can put pressure on the brain, which can damage it. The excess fluid may need draining to reduce the risk of possible brain damage.

**PVL**

PVL stands for Periventricular Leucomalacia. This is damage to the brain tissue itself. This is due to a reduction in the blood and/or oxygen supply to the brain. This can occur before, during, or after the birth of your baby. It may take several weeks before the damage can be seen fully on the head scan.

IVH, Hydrocephalus and PVL increase the risk of your baby developing a range of problems ranging from very mild learning difficulties to cerebral palsy.

**What will happen next?**

Your baby will be given a named consultant paediatrician who will see your baby in the paediatric clinic following discharge from the neonatal unit. For further advice, please do not hesitate to ask the doctor or nurse caring for your baby, who will be happy to talk to you about your baby’s condition and development.
Other sources of useful information

Brain and Spine Foundation
Information on neurological disorders.
Helpline 0808 808 1000
www.brainandspine.org.uk

Cerebra
Foundation for brain-injured children and young people.
01267 244 200
Helpline 0800 328 1159
www.cerebra.org.uk

SCOPE
Support for cerebral palsy and related disabilities.
0808 800 3333
www.scope.org.uk

Glossary

Cerebral palsy
A disorder usually caused by brain damage occurring at or before birth and marked by muscular impairment. Often accompanied by poor coordination, it sometimes involves speech and learning difficulties.

Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF)
The clear fluid that fills the cavities of the brain and covers the surfaces of the brain and spinal cord. It lubricates the tissues and cushions them from shock and injury.

Cranial = Relating to the skull.

Soft Spot = This is also known as the fontanelle. A gap between the bones of a baby’s skull covered with skin and body tissues.

Sonographer = A person that is trained to use an ultrasound machine.

Ultrasound machine = a machine that uses high frequency sound waves to create an image of part of the inside of the body.

Ventricles = Areas of the brain filled with cerebrospinal fluid.

http://www.newbornnetworks.org.uk/staffs/parent_information.htm
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