Bronchopulmonary Dysplasia: What You Need to Know

Bronchopulmonary dysplasia is a condition in which scar tissue develops on the lungs of premature babies. The scar tissue is caused by being on a ventilator. In this handout, you will learn about bronchopulmonary dysplasia and its symptoms. You will also learn how doctors diagnose and treat bronchopulmonary dysplasia.

WHAT IS BRONCHOPULMONARY DYSPLASIA?

Bronchopulmonary dysplasia (also called chronic lung disease) is a condition in which scar tissue or other damage develops on the lungs. The scar tissue or damage is caused by being on a ventilator (breathing machine).

THE VENTILATOR IS SUPPOSED TO HELP MY BABY. HOW DID IT HURT HIS LUNGS?

While a ventilator is important for your baby to breathe properly, the extra pressure from the air can hurt his lungs. The damage can make it harder for your baby to breathe on his own even after he comes off the ventilator.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF BRONCHOPULMONARY DYSPLASIA?

- Poor growth or trouble feeding
- Working hard to breathe
- Coughing or wheezing (whistling sound when breathing in)
- Blue color around the lips, fingernails or toenails
- Repeated lung infections that might require a hospital visit

WILL THE LUNG DAMAGE GET BETTER?

It depends on the type of lung damage. The scar tissue will not go away, but new lung tissue will develop. Over time, your baby will feel better. Treatment can help ease his symptoms while your baby’s lungs recover. Your care team can answer any questions you have about your baby’s lung damage.

HOW DO DOCTORS DIAGNOSE BRONCHOPULMONARY DYSPLASIA?

Doctors can diagnose bronchopulmonary dysplasia if your baby has symptoms and needs oxygen after 28 days on a ventilator. Doctors can diagnose the condition through a chest X-ray or blood test.

HOW DO DOCTORS TREAT BRONCHOPULMONARY DYSPLASIA?

Doctors can treat bronchopulmonary dysplasia in a few ways. The care team will talk with you about which treatments are right for your baby. He might need to continue treatment after leaving the hospital.

Common treatments include:

- Lower-pressure ventilators
- Diuretics (water pills) to lower the amount of fluid built up in the lungs
- Medications, such as bronchodilators (to relax the airways), corticosteroids (to reduce swelling in the airways) or antibiotics.
- If your baby has trouble feeding, a gastrostomy tube (feeding tube)