General Movements Assessment for newborns and infants

What are general movements?
Babies move from 8 weeks into a pregnancy. Babies make general movements that are involuntary and spontaneous movements when they are awake and not distracted. Babies start to develop intentional movements when they are about 3-4 months old.

There are two main times that general movements occur:
- in the ‘writhing’ period from 8 weeks after conception until 8 weeks after their due date
- in the ‘fidgety’ period that is best assessed at 12 weeks after the baby’s due date.

What is the General Movements Assessment and why do we do it?
The General Movements Assessment (the assessment) is used worldwide to identify babies who have a higher risk of having a movement problem called cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy is a condition caused by an injury to the brain that affects movement. It varies in severity and can affect different body parts.

The assessment has been shown to be accurate in predicting which babies are at the highest risk of having movement problems. This means we can refer babies we identify as having a high risk for extra help with their development while they are still very young and while their brains are still developing. The fidgety period (12 weeks after the baby’s due date) is the most accurate time for predicting movement problems.

What does the assessment involve?
In the nursery (writhing movements)
If you consent, we take videos of your baby for between 3 and 10 minutes when they are awake and not distracted. We remove some of their bedding so that we can see their arms and legs moving and avoid directly talking to them or distracting them during the assessment. The videos are checked by our General Movements Team (neonatal doctors, physiotherapists or nursing staff) who are specifically trained in assessing the movements in this test. Sometimes we get a second opinion about the video from our Child Development Services General Movements Team or from other trained professionals in Sydney or Melbourne. We will then explain the results to you and we will include the results in your baby’s discharge letter. We usually take 2-3 videos of babies during their stay in the neonatal department. The assessment results help us plan which babies need extra developmental support and monitoring. Whatever their results, all babies who need a
General Movements Assessment are referred to a child development service or physiotherapist when they leave hospital.

**After you have gone home/12 weeks after the baby’s due date**

**If you live in the ACT**
We refer all babies at high risk of having movement problems to Child Development Services (CDS) after they leave hospital. CDS is a team of physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and social workers who monitor your baby’s development once you are at home. CDS will arrange to have a video of your baby’s movements recorded at 12 weeks after their due date.

**If you live outside of the ACT**
Families from NSW are offered a ‘virtual’ general movements appointment at the growth and development clinic in Canberra. This means you will need to send us a video of your baby that you take 12 weeks after their due date (see instruction leaflet). We will then review the video and call you with the results. If you live near another centre that offers General Movements Assessments we will arrange for your test to be done through your local service.

**What if the assessment confirms the risk?**
This does not mean that your child has cerebral palsy. It does, however, mean that they are at a higher risk of being diagnosed with developmental problems or cerebral palsy in the future.

We know that babies’ brains are very adaptable and that early intervention can improve their long term outcomes. All high risk babies are referred for early intervention when they are discharged home.

**Referral to Cerebral Palsy Alliance:**
If your baby has a General Movements Assessment result that puts them in a high risk category for movement problems and cerebral palsy, we will refer you to the Cerebral Palsy Alliance (CPA) for specific advice and early support. The amount of support that CPA can offer varies across different parts of NSW and the ACT. Sometimes they can offer face to face physiotherapy support. Other times they may offer support to your local physiotherapist to help them provide specific exercises that may help your baby.

**Home exercises:**
You are the most important person when it comes to supporting your baby’s development. All early intervention teams will give you exercises for you to do with your baby at home in between appointments.
Follow-up appointments:
It is important that we continue to see your baby in our growth and development clinic where we look at their individual developmental strengths and weaknesses to try to help make sure they are getting the right support in the community.

Consent and Privacy
We will ask you to sign a consent form. If you give consent for the assessment, our general movements trained health professional will view and assess your child’s video. The videos are stored on a secure, password protected server that is only accessible to the General Movements Team. They are never put on the internet or made accessible to other people.
General Movements Assessment: Filming protocol for families sending videos in from home
Adapted from Royal Prince Alfred Newborn Care NSW General Movements Guideline

Age:
- 12 weeks after the baby’s due date
- Sometimes we may ask you to repeat the video at 14 weeks after the baby’s due date.

Position:
- Put your baby on their back on a plain coloured flat surface – bright colours and contrasting patterns can interfere with scoring
- Make sure they are wearing only a plain singlet and a nappy so that their hands and feet can be seen well
- Take the video when they are awake and calm
- Avoid catching their eye or talking to them as this can suppress fidgety movements

Video:
1. Make sure the whole baby can be seen in the video (including their hands and feet)
2. If you don’t have a tripod just use your phone or video camera and hold it about 2m above your baby
3. Film for about 5 minutes

Please return the video by email or supplied USBs (password protected) by post to:

Neonatal Growth and Development Clinic Coordinator
Department of Neonatology Administration
PO Box 11
Woden ACT 2606

Email: NewbornFollow-Upclinic@act.gov.au
Please email us to let us know when you’ve sent the video so that we can make sure it arrives safely. If you have any questions or concerns please call (02) 6174 7573.
Accessibility

If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like an alternative format, please phone 13 22 81.

If English is not your first language and you need the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS), please call 13 14 50.

For further accessibility information, visit: www.health.act.gov.au/accessibility

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