Umbilical granuloma in babies

Information for parents and carers
What is an umbilical granuloma?

Following birth the umbilical cord is cut as it is no longer required. The cord that is left (known as the umbilicus) is then clamped. It should eventually dry up and fall off, leaving behind a belly button.

However, sometimes a small amount of pink or light red tissue remains when the umbilicus has fallen off. This is called a granuloma. The granuloma prevents normal skin tissue developing and may ooze fluid.

Cause

Umbilical granuloma is the most common umbilical abnormality in newborn babies. The exact cause is unknown but it is related to the tissue healing process.
General care and treatment of your baby’s umbilicus / belly button

Many umbilical granulomas heal up by themselves and do not need any treatment. Follow the procedure below for the first six – eight weeks after you notice the granuloma:

• Roll back the top of your baby’s nappy to keep the umbilical area exposed to the air.
• Clean the area with warm water.
• Keep the umbilical area clean and dry.

If the granuloma does not start to heal within this time, you may want to consider the next approach.

The use of salt

Recent studies have proven that salt is effective at treating umbilical granulomas. It is thought that the salt draws water out of the cells and causes the granuloma to shrink. For this method, follow the steps below:

• Press down on the area around the umbilicus to expose the centre.
• Wash the area with warm water and dry.
• Apply soft paraffin jelly to the healthy surrounding skin.
• Apply a very small pinch of table/ cooking salt to the umbilical granuloma.

• Cover the umbilical area with a gauze swab and secure in place for 30 minutes.

• Avoid using too much salt as this will damage the surrounding normal skin.

• After 30 minutes, clean the area with warm water, making sure all of the salt is removed. Then dry the area.

Repeat this procedure twice a day for three days. After that time you may notice that the granuloma has become smaller, changed colour or it may have completely dried up. A health professional should review the granuloma after seven days.

Occasionally, silver nitrate may be suggested if the granuloma does not heal up after salt treatment. This has to be done by a health professional.

Complications

There is a small possibility that an infection may develop at the umbilical site. If you notice any signs or symptoms such as redness, strong odour, or a thick discoloured discharge, contact your family doctor (GP).
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