

Surfactant

What is surfactant?

Surfactant is a mixture of fat and proteins made in the lungs. Surfactant coats the alveoli (the air sacs in the lungs where oxygen enters the body). This prevents the alveoli from sticking together when your baby exhales (breathes out).

Why is surfactant so important?

Premature infants may be born before their lungs make enough surfactant. Low amounts of surfactant lead to poor lung function. This results in stiff, collapsible lungs and increased fluid in the lungs, making it hard work to breathe. See the education sheet “Respiratory distress syndrome (infant).”

How does this medicine work?

Your baby is receiving a modified natural surfactant. Several brands are available. It is given to replace what your baby’s lungs did not make before birth. Using surfactant has been shown to reduce pneumothorax (collapsed lung) and increase survival rates significantly.

How is it given?

Surfactant comes in a liquid form that is squirted directly into the breathing tube. It then spreads out into the air sacs of the lungs.

How often is it given?

The lungs absorb surfactant over a number of hours so it may need to be given up to 4 times in the first 48 hours of life. The doctor will determine the doses based on your baby’s needs.

What are the side effects?

None are known.

What else do I need to know?

Some infants may need more oxygen or breathing help while the surfactant is being given.

Questions?

This sheet is not specific to your child but provides general information. If you have any questions, please ask the doctor or nurse.

For more reading material about this and other health topics, please call or visit the Family Resource Center library, or visit our Web site: www.childrensmn.org.

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