Outcomes

The pictures in this information sheet are based on what we know about a very small number of babies born in Australia and New Zealand. The babies were between 23 and 26 weeks gestation and were all admitted to an intensive care nursery. The pictures show how many of these babies survived and died at each gestation. They also show (of those who survived) how many did and did not have a moderate to severe disability at around 2–3 years of age.

*Two of 91 babies were 22 weeks | Data source: ANZNN Report 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th>Survive</th>
<th>Die</th>
<th>Disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>5 in 10</td>
<td>5 in 10</td>
<td>75 in 100 do not have a moderate to severe disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>7 in 10</td>
<td>3 in 10</td>
<td>75 in 100 do not have a moderate to severe disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>8 in 10</td>
<td>2 in 10</td>
<td>83 in 100 do not have a moderate to severe disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>9 in 10</td>
<td>1 in 10</td>
<td>86 in 100 do not have a moderate to severe disability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Problems such as a severe disability in babies born very early include:

- Learning difficulties
- Mild cerebral palsy or emotional or behavioural problems
- Problems such as being unable to care for themselves or live independently when they grow up
- Being unable to talk or see or hear properly
- Not being able to walk or get around independently
- Having trouble swallowing or feeding safely
- Having a lot of health problems and needing to visit hospital often
- Needing to go to a separate school for children with special needs
- Being unable to care for themselves or live independently when they grow up

What does it mean for your baby?

It is not possible to know exactly what the future holds for your baby. It depends on many things. For example, how early your baby is born, how much they weigh and how well or sick you and your baby are around the time of birth. Your doctor and midwife will talk with you about your own circumstances and what they might mean for your baby.

What can happen to your baby?

Stillbirth: Some babies die before they are born. Your doctor and midwife will support you through this time. You may like to read the information sheet about stillbirth.

Active treatment: You and your health team may decide that active treatment (doing everything possible) is best for your baby. This will include your baby being admitted to a neonatal intensive care unit (in your own hospital or being transferred to another hospital) where they will have:

- Assistance with breathing (from a breathing machine)
- Antibiotics to help fight infection
- Intravenous lines (a drip) to receive medications, fluids and food
- Monitoring equipment attached to help detect problems early
- Scans and investigations to help decide what treatment is best

Comfort care: You and your health team may decide that comfort care (also known as palliative care) is best for your baby. This may be because, even with the very best treatment, your baby has very little chance of surviving or there is a very high chance of having a severe disability. All care is aimed at making your baby’s remaining time as comfortable as possible. Treatment that doesn’t add to your baby’s comfort is not given. Comfort care may become the right choice for your family later, even if you first decided on active treatment.

What can happen during intensive (active) treatment?

When babies are born very early, their organs and body functions usually haven’t had time to develop fully. This can cause problems after birth. Common problems include bleeding on the brain, difficulty with breathing, being unable to digest milk and being less able to fight infection. The earlier a baby is born, the greater the chance they will have these sorts of problems. It is very common for babies to get better and then get sick again. This can happen many times while they are in hospital. It is very stressful for parents and family. Your health care team will talk with you often about how your baby is doing.

Support & Information


Lifeline 13 11 14 offers a telephone crisis support service. [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)


Harrison’s Little Wings is a high risk pregnancy support service. [https://harrisonslittlewings.org.au](http://https://harrisonslittlewings.org.au)

Sands is a miscarriage, stillbirth and neonatal death support service. [https://www.sands.org.au/](http://https://www.sands.org.au/)


Angel Gowns Australia supplies angel gown garments for babies that have passed away. [https://www.angelgownsaustralia.org.au](http://https://www.angelgownsaustralia.org.au)


Miscarriage Support Australia provides information and support. [https://www.miscarriagesupport.org.au](http://https://www.miscarriagesupport.org.au)