



CLINICAL GUIDELINE	
Feed Intolerance	
Scope (Staff):	Nursing and Medical Staff
Scope (Area):	NICU KEMH, NICU PCH, NETS WA

This document should be read in conjunction with this [DISCLAIMER](#)

The decision whether the feeds should be continued, reduced or stopped will be at the discretion of the attending neonatologist. Feeds are usually stopped if there are bile-stained or large gastric residuals and vomiting and/or abdominal distension and/or blood in the stools. Investigations are carried out and an assessment is made after 12 to 24 hours. Feeds can generally be restarted when the infant has stabilised and has had a 12-24 hour absence of any significant clinical signs of feed intolerance.

Signs of Feed Intolerance

Gastric Residuals

A large gastric residual is defined as a gastric residual > 30% of the total feeds given over the previous four hours or greater than a 1 hour volume if on Continuous Milk Feeds (CMF). Following such a residual, the aspirate is returned to the stomach and the next feed omitted. If the gastric residual prior to the next feed is normal, feeds are resumed. If the gastric residual remains large, a medical review of the feeding schedule is required. Refer to [Enteral Feeding: Bolus Tube Feeds Continuous Milk Feed, Bottle Feed](#).

Bilious Aspirates

Bile can be a sign of ileus or intestinal obstruction. For infants \geq 32 weeks gestation any bilious vomiting is to be discussed with either the consultant or senior registrar. These infants should be investigated to exclude malrotation. For infants < 32 weeks with isolated bile aspirates, continue enteral feeds if the aspirates are clearing or not worsening. Feeds are stopped for 12 to 24 hours if such aspirates are “persistent” and/or “worsening” over 12 to 24 hours. The decision whether the feeds could be **continued but not upgraded** will be at the discretion of the attending neonatologist.

Vomiting

Vomiting may be the result of an over distended stomach, poorly positioned feeding tube, GOR, overstimulation in a LBW infant or may be more sinister - infection, obstruction or a metabolic or neurological disorder.

Abdominal Distension


Distension with or without visible loops can be due to poor gastric motility, ileus, constipation or 'gas'. If the abdomen remains soft / non tender it may resolve with prone positioning or glycerine.

A finding of a tense or tender abdomen with or without visible loops of bowel is abnormal and requires investigation for obstruction, infection or [Necrotising Enterocolitis](#)

Related CAHS internal policies, procedures and guidelines

[Enteral Feeding: Bolus Tube Feeds Continuous Milk Feed, Bottle Feed.](#)
[Necrotising Enterocolitis](#)

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