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Evidence Based Physiological Adaption Of The Neonate : A Literature review

Sari Rahma Fitri,S.ST,M.Keb
Departments of Diploma III Midwifery, Darmo School of Health Sciencees, Medan, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The birth of a neonate represents one of the most critical transitions in human life, as the new born must rapidly adapt from an intrauterine environment to extrauterine conditions. Within the first minutes and hours after delivery, major physiological adjustments occur in multiple systems, including respiratory, cardiovascular, thermoregulatory, metabolic, and immunological functions. These adaptations are essential to ensure survival and support healthy growth and development. The neonatal period, defined as the first 0–28 days of life, is widely recognized as the most vulnerable stage of childhood, with the highest risk of morbidity and mortality compared to later age groups. Globally, neonatal deaths account for almost half of all deaths among children under five years old, highlighting the urgency of improving neonatal care. Although Indonesia has achieved a gradual reduction in neonatal mortality rates, significant challenges remain in reaching national health targets and ensuring equitable access to quality maternal and new born services.

Several conditions continue to contribute substantially to neonatal mortality, including prematurity, birth asphyxia, sepsis, infection, hypo glycemia, intrauterine growth complications, and hypothermia. Inadequate early recognition and delayed management of these problems may lead to severe complications or death. Therefore, healthcare professionals—particularly midwives, nurses, and physicians—must possess comprehensive knowledge of neonatal physiological adaptation in order to provide effective evidence-based interventions during the early postnatal period.

This literature review aims to explore the key physiological adaptation processes in neonates and to summarize current evidence-based strategies for early neonatal care. Emphasis is placed on the importance of timely assessment, appropriate clinical management, and supportive interventions to promote a successful transition to extrauterine life. Strengthening neonatal care practices through improved understanding of physiological adaptation is expected to enhance neonatal outcomes, reduce preventable mortality, and contribute to achieving broader maternal and child health goals.

Corresponding Author:
Sari Rahma Fitri
Darmo School of Health Sciencees
Medan, North Sumatera

ayirahma2014@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The article begins with an explanation of the background, namely the reasons for the need to do research, supported by supporting references/literature. References are not allowed to use non-standard sources such as Wikipedia or blogs, etc. (Abdul, 2017). Editor (2018) requires that articles be original and not plagiarized by other people's work. Goals are written at the end of the background. The minimum number of references used is eight. Writing references and citations refers to the APA style. The birth process represents a major physiological transition not only for parents but also for the neonate. Within seconds after delivery, newborns must adapt from an intrauterine environment, where oxygenation and nutrition are supported by the placenta, to an extrauterine life requiring independent respiration, circulation, thermoregulation, and metabolic balance. This period is critical because neonates aged 0–28 days experience the highest vulnerability to morbidity and mortality compared to other pediatric age groups. Globally, approximately 6,700 neonatal deaths occur daily, accounting for nearly 47% of all deaths in children under five. Although neonatal mortality rates in Indonesia have declined, achieving national targets remains a challenge. Understanding neonatal physiological adaptation is therefore essential for healthcare professionals, particularly midwives, to provide optimal early care and prevent complications such as asphyxia, infection, hypothermia, and metabolic instability.This review aims to describe the major physiological adaptations of neonates and evidence-based interventions that support successful transition after birth.

METHODS

The birth process represents a major physiological transition not only for parents but also for the neonate. Within seconds after delivery, newborns must adapt from an intrauterine environment, where oxygenation and nutrition are supported by the placenta, to an extrauterine life requiring independent respiration, circulation, thermoregulation, and metabolic balance. This period is critical because neonates aged 0–28 days experience the highest vulnerability to morbidity and mortality compared to other pediatric age groups. Globally, approximately 6,700 neonatal deaths occur daily, accounting for nearly 47% of all deaths in children under five. Although neonatal mortality rates in Indonesia have declined, achieving national targets remains a challenge. Understanding neonatal physiological adaptation is therefore essential for healthcare professionals, particularly midwives, to provide optimal early care and prevent complications such as asphyxia, infection, hypothermia, and metabolic instability.This review aims to describe the major physiological adaptations of neonates and evidence-based interventions that support successful transition after birth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Transitional Phases of Neonatal Adaptation

Neonates undergo three phases after birth: First reactive period (0–30 minutes): Increased heart rate (160–180 bpm), irregular breathing, alertness, crying, and possible meconium passage. Decreased responsiveness (60–100 minutes): Infant becomes calmer and may sleep. Second reactive period (2–8 hours): Tachycardia and tachypnea may occur, along with increased mucus production.
2. **Cardiovascular Adaptation** After birth, fetal shunts close: a. **Ductus arteriosus** constricts due to increased oxygenation. b. **Foramen ovale** closes as left atrial pressure rises. c. **Pulmonary circulation** increases as lungs expand, reducing vascular resistance.
3.Respiratory Adaptation Neonates shift from placental gas exchange to lung breathing. Surfactant production, beginning around 20 weeks gestation, prevents alveolar collapse. Initial breaths clear lung fluid, supported by chemical, mechanical, thermal, and sensory stimuli.
4. Thermoregulation Newborns are at high risk of hypothermia due to thin skin and limited fat stores. Heat loss occurs through: Evaporation, Conduction, Convection, Radiation. Preventive care includes drying immediately, warm environment, skin-to-skin contact, delayed bathing, and appropriate clothing.
5. Gastrointestinal Adaptation The gastrointestinal system is immature, making neonates prone to regurgitation and gastroesophageal reflux. Meconium is usually passed within 12–24 hours. Breastfeeding supports digestion and gut microbiota development.
6. Immune System Adaptation Neonatal immunity is underdeveloped: IgG is transferred from the mother, IgM remains low, IgA in colostrum provides intestinal protection, Vaccination and infection monitoring are essential.
7. Renal Adaptation Renal function is limited in early days. Urine output averages 15–60 ml/kg/day, increasing after day 4. Neonates typically lose 5–10% of birth weight due to fluid shifts.
8. Neuromuscular and Hematologic Adaptation Neonates demonstrate primitive reflexes and flexed posture. Tremors may be normal if transient. Hemoglobin levels decline gradually after birth, while vitamin K administration prevents hemorrhagic disease.
9. Hepatic and Integumentary Adaptation The liver regulates bilirubin metabolism and glucose stabilization. Vitamin K is essential for coagulation. Skin is thin and covered with vernix caseosa, which protects against infection and fluid loss.
10. Reproductive and Musculoskeletal Changes Temporary hormonal effects may cause breast swelling or pseudomenstruation in female infants. Skull molding (molase) may occur due to birth canal pressure and resolves naturally.

CONCLUSION

Neonatal physiological adaptation involves complex multi-system transitions essential for survival. Failures in adaptation can lead to life-threatening complications such as respiratory distress, hypothermia, infection, or metabolic disorders. Evidence-based midwifery practices, including immediate drying, skin-to-skin contact, delayed cord clamping, early breastfeeding initiation, vitamin K prophylaxis, and close monitoring during the first hours, significantly improve neonatal outcomes. Healthcare professionals must recognize normal adaptation processes while identifying early warning signs requiring intervention. Strengthening neonatal care protocols is critical to reducing neonatal mortality and achieving national and global health targets.

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