Your new baby and sickle cell trait

"Our newborn baby has sickle cell trait. I was worried Emilio would be sick all the time. Happily, our baby's doctor said that our son can lead a perfectly healthy life. Also, he will not go on to get sickle cell disease.

We learned some sad news too. Both my husband and I have sickle cell trait. That means each time I get pregnant, there's a chance our child could have sickle cell disease. We are thinking about adopting in the future because sickle cell disease is hard for a child to live with."

Sickle cell trait is not the same as sickle cell disease

You just learned your baby has sickle cell trait. The good news is your baby will not develop sickle cell disease—a serious health problem. Millions of people with sickle cell trait live full and healthy lives. In fact, 1 in every 100 Hispanics has sickle cell trait.

Most people with sickle cell trait have no health problems. But a few have:

- Blood in their urine (pee) from time to time
- Pain or discomfort when at high altitudes, as up in the mountains or in an unpressurized airplane
- Problems exercising in hot weather if they don't drink enough water

Take your child to see a doctor right away if your child gets any of these health problems.

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How sickle cell trait is passed

Sickle cell trait is passed on from parents to their children—and grandchildren—through genes. There are genes for hair color, eye color, and also for the types of hemoglobin we make in red blood cells.

In a baby with **normal** hemoglobin (AA):

- Each parent passed down the normal hemoglobin gene (A).

In a baby with sickle cell **trait** (AS):

- One parent passed down the sickle cell gene (S), while the other passed down the normal hemoglobin gene (A).

In a baby with sickle cell **disease** (SS):

- Each parent passed down the sickle cell gene (S).

When both parents have sickle cell trait, with each pregnancy the baby could have one of these:

- **Normal** hemoglobin (AA)
- Sickle cell **trait** (AS)
- Sickle cell **disease** (SS)

When one parent has sickle cell trait and the other has normal hemoglobin genes, with each pregnancy the baby could have one of these:

- **Normal** hemoglobin (AA)
- Sickle cell **trait** (AS)

Consider testing before you have your next baby

It is a good idea for both parents to get tested for abnormal hemoglobin genes before you plan your next baby. A simple blood test will let you know about your hemoglobin genes. If you **or** your partner has sickle cell trait, go to a genetic counselor. This expert will let you know the chance of your baby being born with sickle cell trait or sickle cell disease.

How can I learn more about sickle cell trait?

- Talk to your OB-GYN about testing.
- Contact the SCDAA (Sickle Cell Disease Association of America) at **800- 421-8453**. Or, go to our website: **www.sicklecelldisease.org**

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