

A.L.T.E.

(Apparent Life Threatening Events)



EMERGENCY MEDICAL
SERVICES AGENCY
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

DEFINITION:

An Apparent Life Threatening Events (ALTE) in a pediatric patient (**12 months and under**) is described as an episode that is frightening to the observer and characterized by some combination of:

- ┆ transient apnea
- ┆ color change (usually cyanotic or pallid but occasionally erythematous or plethoric)
- ┆ marked changes in muscle tone (usually marked limpness)
- ┆ choking
- ┆ gagging

INCIDENCE:

Various estimates place the incidence in the general population at 0.5% - 6.0% of all infants. For various reasons, the true frequency and prevalence of ALTE are unknown.

SIGNIFICANCE OF ALTE:

A.L.T.E may occur during sleep wakefulness or feeding and may be a symptom of many specific disorders including, but not limited to:

- ┆ gastrointestinal reflux
- ┆ infection
- ┆ seizures
- ┆ airway abnormality
- ┆ hypoglycemia
- ┆ metabolic problems
- ┆ impaired regulation of breathing during sleep and feeding

Evaluation:

Infants usually appear entirely normal by the time they reach the Emergency Department! The most important diagnostic step is to obtain a careful **history of current complaint** from the person who witnessed the events:

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ┆ Color | ┆ Noises |
| red | choking |
| pale | stridor |
| cyanotic | ┆ Eye Movements |
| ┆ Respiratory effort | closed |
| apnea | startled |
| obstruction | rolled |
| irregular | fluttering |
| ┆ Sleep state | ┆ Relationship to feeding |
| awake | ┆ Fluid in the mouth? |
| asleep | ┆ Duration |
| ┆ Position | ┆ Need for intervention by caretaker |
| prone | |
| supine | |
| upright | |

MANAGEMENT OF ALTE:

For ALTE, an aggressive approach is necessary to identify the etiology of the event and to initiate appropriate therapy. **Hospital admission** for protective monitoring, to facilitate the diagnostic evaluation and parental training is recommended.

RESOURCES:

Perkins, Ronald M., "Apparent Life - Threatening Events: Recognition, Differentiation, and Management", The Practical Journal of Pediatric Emergency Medicine: Pediatric Emergency Medicine Reports, November 1998.