

Newborn Care

Caring for your newborn is a challenging job. When awake, your baby will need feeding, changing, cleaning, and variety in stimulation. It is through the senses that your baby learns about life. Give your infant the necessary time and plenty of love.

YOUR BABY'S ENVIRONMENT

Both you and your baby need time to yourselves. If an extra room is available, make it into a nursery. Try to make the nursery a place that will be exciting to your child with brightly colored objects, mobiles, and other stimuli.

Your baby's room should be kept at a comfortable temperature (68° to 72°F or 20° to 22°C). During the winter, home heating is drying, so use a cool mist humidifier where your child sleeps. In the hot summer, the room should be well ventilated.

There is no need to confine the baby to the nursery. You can give your child varied experiences by providing new environments such as a play area or other rooms in your home or at a friend's house. Also, take your infant outside when the weather is nice. Special protection may be necessary when out in cold weather such as appropriate winter clothing or in bright sunlight with light coverups to limit skin exposure to only a few minutes.

SLEEPING

There is considerable confusion among parents and publications about infant sleep positions. Your baby probably has a preferred sleeping position which seems most comfortable. Recent research indicates that placing your infant on the side or on the back decreases the risk of sudden infant death syndrome so discuss this with your doctor. It is best for infants to sleep on a firm mattress. A pillow should not be used because your infant may not be able to lift the head up and out of it which could result in suffocation.

If you go about your daily business as usual, your child will become accustomed to sleeping with household sounds. If you are tired and have no other children or responsibilities, use your baby's nap time to rest.

CLEANLINESS

Until your child's cord has come off and the navel heals, it is best to just sponge bathe the baby. Remember, a soapy baby is a slippery baby. It is a good idea to rest your child on a towel while sponging. It is not necessary to bathe your baby daily.

Real bathing can be done in any object that holds water and is convenient, such as a large pan, sink, or baby tub. Again, placing a towel or washcloth on the bottom of the tub will make it less slippery. When using a sink, be sure the hot water spigot has cooled. **ALWAYS TEST THE BATH WATER TO BE SURE THAT IT IS NOT TOO HOT!** Use a mild soap and infant washcloth for bathing. For shampooing, the same soap or a mild shampoo will be fine. Bath time should be a stimulating, cheerful, wet experience for both you and your child.

There is often considerable concern about caring for the ears. They should be gently cleansed using a washcloth. It is not necessary to clean the canal with cotton swabs. Wax is a normal product of the ears and is not dirt. The nose, too, can be adequately cleansed using a washcloth. In general, it is not necessary to clean, prod, or dig mucus out of the nostrils. For girls, use the washcloth to clean the genitals, particularly between the lips (labia), washing from front to back.

After bathing, pat dry with a soft towel. It is not necessary to powder, lotion, or oil your baby. Some infants' skin is sensitive to these substances. Sometimes these provide a place for infections to begin. If you feel compelled to rub something on your child, use a lotion but not a petroleum jelly or oil as these do not allow the skin to breathe. If you feel compelled to powder your baby, use cornstarch or cornstarch-based powder because the talc in some powders is harmful if inhaled.

At first, it will be necessary to cut the nails frequently to prevent your baby from scratching himself. This is best done using blunt infant nail scissors when the baby is asleep or sleepy as there may be less of a struggle. Nail clippers are deceiving and you can easily clip the finger or toe tip. Cut the nails in a straight line rather than curves to reduce the risks of ingrowing.

CLOTHING

Your baby needs to be dressed comfortably for the temperature that will be experienced. Usually this means dress as you dress, in less clothing than you think the baby needs and much less clothing than grandparents

think is needed! A baby's hands and feet often feel cool. Feel the chest or back to see whether your baby is really cold.

Your infant's clothes should be washed in mild detergent. It is a good idea to wash all new clothes before your child wears them. This removes many possible irritants.

DIAPER

Because most newborns wet frequently, they may require diaper changing 15 to 20 times each day. The number and type of bowel movements will vary according to what your child is fed. Formula-fed infants move their bowels on the average of one to four times a day. Breast-fed babies will have a movement which will be light yellow and pasty in consistency as often as every feeding, or infrequent movements every two to four days of the same consistency. It is common for bowels to move after feeding since this stimulates the intestinal tract. It is normal for your infant to appear to grunt and strain. As long as the movement is soft, then the baby is not constipated.

It is important to clean the baby after each bowel movement. Use a washcloth, cotton balls, or tissue moistened with lukewarm water. Wipe gently from front to back. If your baby has sensitive skin, you may also need to wash the entire bottom when changing a wet diaper.

Soiled cloth diapers should be rinsed in the toilet before they are placed in the diaper pail. Diapers should be washed with a mild soap or detergent. If they are washed by hand, rinse them enough to get the water clear. If you are using a machine, wash them with hot water. When bleaching, use a double rinse. Diapers can be line dried for sun bleaching, thus avoiding chemicals. Many babies are sensitive to fabric softeners so use these sparingly, if at all. Diaper services and disposable diapers are nice conveniences.

FEEDING

Feeding is discussed in another handout.

OTHER CARE

Other problems concerning the care of your infant should be discussed with your doctor's staff or your doctor. It is helpful for you to write down your questions and their answers.

Suggested Handouts, Readings and Videos

Baby Alive videotape and book⁴, *Baby Basics*⁶, Taking Your Child's Temperature¹, Calling your Child's Doctor¹, Immunizations (generally and or specific to those to be given)⁵.

Additional Resources for Parents

General Child Care

Babyhood or Your Baby and Child, both by P. Leach; Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care by B. Spock and M. Rothenberg; The Well Baby Book by M. Samuels and N. Samuels; What To Expect the First Year by A. Eisenberg, H. Murkoff, and S. Hathaway; Caring For Your Baby and Young Child by American Academy of Pediatrics; Taking Care of Your Child by R. Pantell, J. Fries, and D. Vickery; A Family Doctor's Answer Guide to Your Child's Health by M. Cohen (after 1/95)

Growth and Development

Infants and Mothers by T. Brazelton; The First Twelve Months of Life by T. Caplan; The Earliest Relationship by T. Brazelton and B. Cramer

Other

Nursing Your Baby by K. Pryor; The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding by La Leche League; The Nursing Mother's Companion by K. Huggins; Bestfeeding: Getting Breastfeeding Right for You by M. Renfrew, C. Fisher, S. Arms; How To Have a Smarter Baby by S. Ludington-Hoe and S. Golant; Your Premature Baby by F. Manginello and T. Digeronimo; Premature Babies by W. Sammons and J. Lewis; Child Care Choices by E. Zigler and M. Lang



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