



early days

baby care

New washing machine, DVD, electric toothbrush – all come with instruction manuals. But babies, the most complex piece of natural engineering ever, come with nothing. That's why we all need a few tips.

Remember, everything's new for your baby, so if he bawls at bath time, gets stressed when he's dressed, or says no to nappies, remind yourself it will get easier. Simply do what works for you. As long as your baby is safe, fed and loved, you will be getting most things right. And, if possible, share the care with dad. It'll give him some bonding time – and you a well-earned break.

Topping and tailing

Newborn babies don't need to be bathed every day. You could just do a daily top-and-tail, cleaning his face, neck, hands, plus the nappy area, with damp cotton wool, and save baths for when your baby really needs them. For the face, using cotton wool dipped into cooled boiled water reduces the risk of eye infections.

- 1 When cleaning your baby's eyes, wipe from inner to outer. (Use a new piece of cotton wool for each wipe.) Then clean his face, behind his ears and under his chin.
- 2 Unfurl his fists to clean his hands.
- 3 You'll also need to get into the creases: the top of the legs, under the armpits, behind the ears and under the chin.

- 4 Clean the nappy area, wiping girls from front to back.

- 5 Pat gently dry.

Cord care

To help healing, keep your baby's cord stump clean and dry – it should fall off anytime from five days onwards. When it needs cleaning, use cotton wool and water, patting dry with cotton wool balls (wash your hands before and after). If you notice a bad smell, stickiness or bleeding, check with your midwife or doctor as these may mean an infection.



Bathing

You can bath your baby anywhere – in a baby bath, the sink, your bath (either with you or not). But never leave your baby alone, even for a second.

- 1 Gather together towels, cotton wool, cooled boiled water, clean nappy and sleepsuit. Keep the room warm.
- 2 Wash your baby's face, as for topping and tailing, then fill the bath a little, checking the temperature with your elbow (your hand may be hot or cold so will not give you an accurate guide to the temperature).

It should feel neutral – neither hot like your own bath, nor cold.

- 3 Undress your baby and then lower him into the bath, supporting him with one hand. Swish water around him and dampen his hair – you don't need bubble bath or shampoo in the early days. Some babies like to have their heads wet first and then be lowered into the bath. There are a variety of items available that will support your baby in a big bath while you wash him.
- 4 Wrap him in a towel and pat dry, getting into all the creases.

nappy knowhow

Talking dirty

Poo is something you'll become very familiar with. So what should you expect? For a couple of days your baby will pass meconium, which is greenish-black and very sticky. Then his poo will turn greenish brown. By around day 5-6, breastfed babies' poo will be runny, curdy, mustard-coloured and won't really smell. Bottle-fed babies will have darker, more solid, smellier poo.

All change

Nappy-changing may feel fiddly at first, but you'll get lots of practice! After the first few days, dirty nappies are fairly frequent and you should get at least six wet nappies a day.

- 1 Lay your baby on a changing mat or towel and undo the dirty nappy, then use damp cotton wool to clean the area. (You don't need to buy special wipes; cotton wool and water are gentler on the skin.) Clean girls from front to back and be careful not to pull back a baby boy's foreskin.

- 2 Little boys tend to wee once they feel the air, so have something like a tissue ready to cover his willy. You could put your baby on a terry or small towel, so that if he or she wees it will soak it up.
- 3 Put on the new nappy – try to point a boy's willy downwards as this will help to prevent the nappy from leaking.
- 4 If possible, tip a dirty nappy's contents down the loo. Put reusables to soak, fold disposables and bag dirty ones before putting them in the bin.

A mobile or picture book can be useful to distract your baby's attention while he's having his nappy changed.

The bottom line

Bottle-fed babies may get constipated or dehydrated. Give cooled boiled water if their poo is hard or dry, if there are fewer than six wet nappies a day or their wee looks dark. If you breastfeed when your baby wants feeding, your baby shouldn't get dehydrated. But however you feed, see your GP if your baby's nappies are very smelly or watery, or contain blood or mucus.



what to wear

Dressing-up time

Many newborns object (loudly!) to dressing or undressing, yelling when they feel air on their skin or clothes going over their head. With dribbled milk and leaky nappies, you may get through several outfits a day in the first few weeks, so keep clothes simple. Sleepsuits – with poppers down the front – make nappy changing easier and are great for day and night.

Clothes that you wrap around your baby may be better than ones that you have to pull over his head, cardigans are simpler than jumpers, for instance. Watch out for any wrinkles or bumps that might annoy your newborn baby, such as hoods. When dressing your baby, be guided by how many layers you need; he probably needs one more layer than you. A vest and sleepsuit, plus cardigan if it's cold, should be enough when you're indoors. When going out, add a jacket or pramsuit (depending on the season) and a hat. But beware of overheated shops and pull back blankets and undo jackets. To check your baby's not too hot or cold, slip your hand down his front or feel the back of his neck – he should feel warm, not sweaty or chilly.

Up and down

If you have a caesarean then going up and downstairs may be hard at first, so if possible keep a supply of nappies/sleepsuits/cotton wool in the room that you spend most time in.

Go with the flow

This is the one time in your life when you're entitled to be curled up on the sofa in your dressing gown in the middle of the afternoon. Housework can wait. When your baby sleeps, you should try to rest too – you deserve it. Give yourself the time to enjoy the first magical weeks.

Clothes-care tips

- Wash clothes, bedding and towels in non-bio powder or liquid – biological can irritate newborn skin.
- Wash new clothes before using to remove shop treatments and fabric finishes.
- Unstitch rough labels so they don't scratch your baby. Look out for any vests that have 'hard' logos or pictures stitched on the front; the reverse side might irritate your baby.
- Tumble drying makes metal poppers and zips hot – check these before you dress your baby.
- Make sure sticky nappy tapes aren't touching your baby's skin.

read on

The NCT publishes a booklet called **Early Days – life with a new baby** (£2.50). This gives helpful information on how to cope during those first few weeks and looks at tiredness, crying, feeding and the basics of baby care. Available from NCT Sales www.nctsales.co.uk or on 0870 112 1120

Early Days – Life with a new baby

