

Caring For Your Newborn

Infant Brain Development

The newborn period is a time of tremendous growth, and a million nerve connections are made every second in a newborn's brain. Responding to your baby's cues with back and forth interactions and using your voice, touch, and body to soothe and engage with your baby is the best way to stimulate your baby's learning.

Language

Babies are born able to recognize their mother's voice, and familiar voices can soothe, comfort and teach them from the beginning.

- There is a specific way of talking to babies that has been shown to help them learn language best called parentese, which means using a high-pitched, sing-song voice with real words and exaggerated facial expressions.
- We also recommend you speak in the language you feel most comfortable with, usually your native language, so you can express yourself and your emotions better.
- Try speaking to your baby often. Hearing lots of words now helps build a child's vocabulary later. You can use "sportscasting", which means narrating and commenting on what you are doing, moment-by-moment and saying the steps out loud. Also try labeling everything around your child – including things, people and even emotions.
- Talking to your baby during everyday activities, such as bathing, changing a diaper or getting dressed, turns daily routines into opportunities for learning.

Responsive, or Sensitive, Parenting

Your connection is fundamental to your baby's development and physical health. When a baby feels that their needs are going to be met and that they're heard, seen and loved, those feelings allow their brains to focus on all the new things they need to learn and understand. You and your baby are getting to know each other, and have many opportunities to build your relationship.

Infant Cues

You may feel like you're sometimes playing detective to figure out what your baby is communicating. That's normal. Remember that crying is a normal way babies communicate. They may also stare blankly when they're getting too tired, look away if they're overstimulated, or become squirmy when they are uncomfortable or upset.

Faces

Whenever possible, let your baby see your face up close. They are watching and learning from your smile, your eyes and the way your mouth moves while you speak. It's also great for them to see the delight you feel when you look at them.

Touch

Responding to your baby by holding them and helping them calm down is so important. Being held, snuggled and cuddled makes babies feel safe and secure, not spoiled. Try holding your baby skin-to-skin. In addition to soothing your baby, skin-to-skin can help with the baby's heart rate, blood pressure, temperature, blood sugar, and even your milk production.

Tummy Time

Practice tummy time from the start to help your baby's strength and development. You can start out at a few seconds and build up to 3-5 minutes several times a day.

Feeding

At this age, feeding is on-demand, meaning your baby leads the schedule. However, sleepy babies need to be woken up to feed every 3-4 hours. In general, newborn babies should feed 8-12 times per day. Signs that can suggest your baby is hungry are rooting, hands in the mouth or crying. At this age, babies do not need water or cereal – just breastmilk or formula.

- For breastfeeding babies, try feeding about 15-20 minutes per side each feed. The first few days, babies are mostly getting colostrum, which is very nutritious.
- For formula-fed babies, in the first day or two, they may need only up to 15 ml, or ½ an ounce, at each feed. Once a baby goes home, they will, on average, have 1-3oz about every 1-3 hours.

Monitoring wet diapers in addition to weight is a good way to assess if your baby is getting enough. At least 1 wet diaper on day 1, 2 wet diapers on day 2, at least on 3 on day 3 and 4 or more from day 4 onward. Babies should be back at their birth weight by 2 weeks of life.

Bowel Movements

We expect your baby to poop at least once in the first 24 hours of life. The first bowel movements are black, sticky, meconium poop. However, within a few days, stool will typically become looser, yellow and seedy. There is lots of variation in how often babies poop.

Spitting Up

It is normal for babies to spit up. If the spit up is effortless and the color of the milk, we typically do not worry about it. Burping can help them spit up less and possibly feed better. Techniques for burping include holding the baby over your shoulder or, holding the baby in a sitting position, supporting the neck and gently patting or rubbing the back.

Umbilical Cord Care

The umbilical cord usually falls off between 1-3 weeks after birth. You do not need any alcohol or special lotions in the area. Sponge baths are usually recommended until the cord has fallen off.

Bathing

It is not necessary to give your baby a bath every day. When you do decide to bathe your baby, first make sure you have everything ready before you begin so you don't have to leave the baby alone. Remember to avoid soaps with heavy perfumes or fragrances, and use bath time as an opportunity to sportscast what you are doing to introduce language and soothe your baby with your voice.

Diapers

Most disposable diapers have tabs on the back and an indicator strip on the front that changes color when the diaper gets wet. There is no need to use any diaper cream for routine diaper changes. If your baby develops a diaper rash, talk with your doctor. During diaper changes, your baby is the perfect distance away from your face to see your mouth when speaking, so talk to your baby throughout all daytime diaper changes.

Genital Care

For babies who have been circumcised, we recommend that you keep the tip of the penis well lubricated with petroleum jelly.

Sleep Safety

Here are *some* things you can do to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, also known as SIDS:

- Place your baby on their back to sleep.
- Have your baby sleep in their own space, like a crib or a basinet, with a firm mattress and fitted sheets.
- Allow no loose blankets, pillows, stuffed animals, or sleep positioners in the crib.
- Ideally, have your baby sleep in the same room, but not the same bed, as you (or another adult).
- Have a smoke-free environment.
- Introduce a pacifier.
- Avoid overheating.

Sleep Habits

Newborns may not be able to tell the difference between day and night and may actually be more awake at night than during the day. During the daytime, try to make feedings and diaper changes more stimulating by talking, making eye contact and giving your baby exposure to natural light. At nighttime, everything should be quieter, with dimmer lights, less talking and less eye contact.

Try to give your newborn an opportunity to sleep every 1.5 to 2 hours after being awake. A tired baby is much more likely to be a fussy baby and have difficulty calming their body down and going to sleep. If you can, work towards putting your baby down to sleep awake but in a drowsy state. As your baby gets older, try not to have them fall fully asleep on you or while feeding or in motion.

Even though your baby is not sleeping through the night, try establishing a bedtime routine between 6-8pm. This may include bath, breast, bottle, maybe some rocking or singing.

Soothing

Crying is one of the ways babies tell us their wants and needs. Between 3-8 weeks of life, many babies become more fussy, with peak fussiness around 6 weeks. All babies need help calming their bodies during this time, as they are too young to soothe themselves. There are many ways to soothe a newborn. You may try swaddling, using a pacifier, having a white noise machine, whispering “shhhh” into their ear, or rocking or gentle bouncing. It is essential that you never shake your baby - as forcefully shaking a baby can cause damage to the brain.

Baby Blues and Postpartum Depression

Approximately 50-80% of mothers will experience something called baby blues in the first 1-3 weeks after giving birth. Symptoms of baby blues include mood swings with intense feelings of sadness, crying, or feeling irritable or overwhelmed, followed by feelings of joy and love for your baby moments later. These feelings typically come and go and generally do not significantly affect your ability to care for your baby or yourself. Baby blues will typically resolve within 2-3 weeks, and getting outside each day, talking about your feelings and asking for support in caring for your baby can be very helpful. While baby blues are normal, if you're feeling sad, down, anxious or very worried for most of the day, or for many days in a row, or if you're suddenly feeling uninterested in things you're normally interested in, or have difficulty caring for yourself or your baby, these can be symptoms of more serious conditions called postpartum depression or postpartum anxiety. These symptoms can be similar to baby blues, but are more severe, last most of the day and continue beyond the first couple of weeks. It is important to discuss any symptoms related to your mood that you may be experiencing with your healthcare provider – yours or your baby's. These are treatable medical conditions that, if left untreated, can have a long-term impact on both you and your child's health.

Closing Messages

We want to remind you that you and your baby are both learning so much at this age. Recognizing your baby's cues and responding with warmth and consistency are the best ways to help your baby's development and brain growth in this early period. Have patience and confidence in the important role you play. You and your child's provider are a team in caring for your baby, and it's always fine to call with any question or concern.