

Newborn Skin Care

Definition

- Newborns have sensitive skin
- It can easily become irritated by all the new chemicals and fabrics that touch it. Rashes and tiny bumps are normal.
- Babies with perfect skin are only found in advertising

Health Information

Topics Covered

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Care Advice

1. Shedding Skin: Normal in Newborns

- Newborns normally shed their skin soon after birth. This can be expected after being in a water bath for 9 months.
- This process begins on day 2 of life and continues for about 2 weeks.
- The amount can vary from flaking to actual peeling.
- It's worse on the hands and feet.
- Babies born 1 or 2 weeks late often peel the most.
- No treatment is needed.
- As the dry skin flakes off, the new skin will be very pink.
- If any cracks occur, apply a baby cream or ointment to help healing. Apply twice per day.

2. Bathing:

- Babies only need a complete bath 1 or 2 times a week. Washing the bottom after poopy diapers is much more important. See details below.
- Keep bath time to 10 minutes or less.
- For babies, the skin can be cleansed with warm water alone. Soap is not needed. Reason: baby skin is not dirty. Warm water can remove any food or house dust that gets on it.
- During the first 2 weeks, use a sponge bath. Do this until a few days after the cord has fallen off and the belly button is healed. Reason: Try to keep the cord dry. A wet cord can interfere with its drying out and falling off. Getting the cord a little wet doesn't matter.
- Rinse your baby's face with warm water a few times per day. Reason: to remove dried milk or food. Cleanse the hands if they become dirty.
- Don't forget to cleanse the neck. Reason: dribbled milk and food can build up and cause a rash.
- Also wiping off the outer eyelids with clean warm water is safe.
- Don't forget to wash off the genital area. Rinse the area with warm water and wipe from front to back.

3. **Soaps: Not Needed**
 - Babies don't need soap. Reason: Soaps take the natural protective oils out of the skin. Once they are gone, the skin becomes dry. It can't hold moisture.
 - If you want to use a soap, use a gentle unscented baby soap. Use a small amount.
 - Avoid any soaps on itchy areas or rashes. Reason: soap delays healing.
4. **Skin Products: Not Needed**
 - Normal newborn skin does not need any routine creams or lotions.
 - Avoid oils, ointments, or any greasy products. Reason: they will almost always block the small sweat glands. That will lead to a heat rash or even pimples.
 - Avoid powders. Reason: powders can be inhaled into the lungs. Talcum powder can cause serious lung damage. Cornstarch powder is simply not needed since the invention of super-absorbent diapers.
5. **Washing Hair and Shampoo:**
 - Wash your baby's hair once or twice a week.
 - Use a special tear-free baby shampoo that doesn't sting the eyes.
 - Don't worry about hurting the soft spot on the head. It's well protected.
 - If your baby has scales or crusts on the scalp, see the Cradle Cap handout.
6. **Changing Diapers and Cleansing the Bottom:**
 - After you remove a wet diaper, you don't need to do anything. Urine does not contain any germs. And hardly any urine is left of the skin. Reason: diapers are so absorbent.
 - Don't waste a diaper wipe.
 - After poopy diapers, clean visible stool off the skin with diaper wipes. Then you need to also rinse the bottom in a basin of warm water or with a warm wet washcloth. Reason: You can't remove all stool with wipes. Unlike urine, stool contains millions of bacteria. The film of stool left on the skin causes many diaper rashes.
 - In boys, stool can hide under the scrotum, so rinse carefully there.
 - In girls, carefully clean the creases of the vaginal lips (labia). Always wash from front to back.
7. **Umbilical Cord Cleansing:**
 - Use what is called Dry Cord Care (natural drying). For details, see separate handout.
 - Check the skin around the base of the cord once a day. Clean away any dried secretions. Use a wet cotton swab or damp cloth. Then dry carefully.
 - You will need to push down on the skin around the cord to get at this area. You may also need to bend the cord a little to get underneath it.
 - Caution: don't use any rubbing alcohol or other germ killer. Reason: dry cords fall off sooner. (Exception: instructed by your doctor to use alcohol).
 - Air exposure helps the cord stay dry and fall off. Keep diapers folded down below the cord area.
8. **Fingernails and Toenails:**
 - Cut the toenails straight across to prevent ingrown toenails.
 - When you cut fingernails, round off the corners of the nails. Reason: so your baby doesn't scratch himself or others.
 - Trim the fingernails once a week and toenails every other week. Use special baby nail clippers.
 - Cut the nails after a bath, when they are softer.
 - This job usually takes two people, one to hold the fingers still. Some parents can do it while the baby is asleep.

Call Your Doctor If

- You have other questions or concerns

Pediatric Care Advice

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