

## Newborn Care: What to Expect

### Your new baby

As you welcome your newborn home, you probably are excited. But you also may feel a little afraid and worried. It's normal to wonder if you know what you are doing, especially if you are a first-time parent. You may have questions about the best way to feed, diaper, and comfort your baby. But you'll find that taking care of your newborn gets easier every day.

### How your baby sleeps

Most babies sleep about 18 hours each day. They wake for a short time at least every 2 to 3 hours. Your baby will usually be hungry and need to be fed when waking up.

You will notice that your baby is sometimes active during sleep. They may make sounds or seem restless. This happens about every hour and usually lasts a few minutes. If you leave your baby alone, they will likely stay asleep.

At first, your baby may sleep through noises. Later, noises may wake your baby.

### Why diaper changes are important

Your newborn's wet and soiled diapers can give you clues about your baby's health. For example, a hard or dry stool could mean that your baby is not getting enough liquids or that your baby is losing liquids because of a fever or other illness. An increase in the number of bowel movements or a lot of liquid in stools could be a sign of diarrhea.

Your baby's diapers can also help you tell if your baby is eating enough. In the first few days, your baby may have about 3 wet diapers



a day. After that, expect 6 or more wet diapers a day throughout the first month of life.

Many newborns have at least 1 or 2 bowel movements a day. By the end of the first week, your baby may have as many as 5 to 10 a day. But as your baby eats more and matures during that first month, the number of bowel movements may decrease. By 6 weeks of age, your baby may not have a bowel movement every day. This usually is not a problem, as long as the baby seems comfortable and is healthy and growing, and the stools aren't hard.

Change your baby's diaper as soon as it's soiled. This will help prevent diaper rash.

### When to feed your baby

Newborns eat when they are hungry and stop eating when they are full. You need to follow this pattern when you feed your baby. Breastfeed or bottle-feed your baby when your baby seems hungry. Do not set a schedule.

During the first 2 weeks, your baby will breastfeed at least 8 times in a 24-hour period. Formula-fed babies may need fewer feedings, at least 6 every 24 hours.

These early feedings often are short. Sometimes, a newborn nurses or drinks from a bottle only for a few minutes. Feedings gradually will last longer.

You may have to wake your sleepy baby to feed in the first few days after birth.

## What crying means

Newborns cry to let you know about having a wet diaper, being hot or cold, or wanting to be fed. If you act quickly to meet your baby's need, the crying usually stops.

Some babies have a fussy time of day, often for 2 to 3 hours during the late afternoon to early evening. Try to give your baby extra attention during these crying periods. But the crying may continue no matter how much comfort you give.

If your newborn cries, try these ways to take care of your baby's needs:

- Check to see if your baby is hungry or has a dirty diaper.
- Hold your baby to your chest while you take and release deep breaths.
- Swing, rock, or walk with your baby. Some babies love to go for stroller walks or car rides.
- Tell stories and sing songs to your baby.

## How to care for the umbilical cord stump

After the umbilical cord is cut at birth, a stump of tissue stays attached to your baby's navel. The stump slowly dries and shrivels until it falls off, usually 1 to 2 weeks after birth.

Keep your baby's diaper folded below the stump. If that doesn't work well, before you put the diaper on your baby, cut out a small area near the top of the diaper to keep the cord open to air.

To keep the cord dry, give your baby a sponge bath instead of bathing your baby in a tub or sink.

You may notice a red, raw-looking spot right after the stump falls off. A small amount of fluid may ooze out of the navel area. This is normal. The navel area should dry out within a few days. It should dry completely and look mostly healed within 2 weeks after the stump falls off.

## Keep your baby safe

Always put your baby to sleep on their back, not the stomach. This lowers the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Do not use infant head-shaping pillows or sleep positioners. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warns that these items could be unsafe for your baby.