

# How to Give Your Newborn Baby a Bath

This handout will help prepare you to wash your baby safely and to give special care after the bath. Bath time can be a happy time for both parents and baby. This time allows the baby to play without the restriction of clothing. It is also a time for the parent and baby to get to know each other, to touch and have eye contact.

When you wash your baby is up to you. The bath can be a morning routine or just before bedtime. It is, however, a good idea to wash your baby before a feeding. If you bathe your baby right after a feeding, your baby may vomit.

Your baby's nurse will show you how to give your baby a bath. You will not need to wash your baby every day. A soap bath of the whole body can be given 2 to 3 times a week. On the other days wash the hands, feet and diaper area with soap and water. The face is to only be washed with water. As soon as the umbilical cord falls off and the area is healed, you may give your baby tub baths. The cord usually falls off in 1 to 2 weeks. Until then, only give your baby a sponge bath.

## Supplies

- Mild soap, without alcohol or perfumes
- Soft wash cloth
- Towels, regular or hooded
- Container of water if not near the sink
- Diaper



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**Learn more about your health care.**

- Clothes
- Blanket
- Comb and hair brush
- Manicure scissors or clippers

## **Safety Tips**

- The temperature of the water should be 100 degrees F to prevent chilling or burning. If you do not have a bath thermometer, use your wrist to test the water. It should feel warm, **not** hot.
- The room should be free of drafts, such as open windows or fans.
- **Never leave your baby alone!** Not for a second. If the telephone rings or someone knocks on the door ignore it and finish the bath. Accidents can occur quickly.
- Always support the baby's head during the bath. Always keep a firm grip on the baby. A soapy baby can be very slippery.

## **How to Bathe Your Baby**

Until your baby's cord falls off and / or the circumcision heals, give your baby a sponge bath on a folded towel, as shown to you by your baby's nurse. After the cord falls off or circumcision heals, you can use a sink basin or infant tub.

1. Arrange all your supplies within easy reach.
2. Wash your hands. Use a clean cloth.
3. Fill the basin or infant tub with warm water.
4. Test the water for a comfortable temperature.
5. Undress your baby and place him or her in the basin of water or on the folded towel, if giving a sponge bath.

## **Washing the Eyes**

Use only water and a clean wash cloth to clean the eyes. Begin with the inside of eye and wash toward ear. Use a clean part of the wash cloth and wash the other eye.

## Washing the Face

Wash your baby's face with water, but do not use soap.

## Washing the Ears

Use your little finger tucked inside a wet wash cloth to clean ears. Never use Q-tips inside your baby's ear.



## Washing the Hair and Scalp

While your baby is lying on the pad or in the basin, reach under the baby's back and lift the back and head up with your arm. Cradle the head in your hand and the baby's back lying on your forearm. This gives your baby a sense of security and gives you a firm grip on his or her body.

Wet your baby's head with water. Use mild soap or shampoo and place it on the wash cloth. Apply lather to your baby's head. Gently rub the lather over the head from front to back. Keep soap out of the eyes. Rinse the head with clean water and pat dry gently with the towel.

## Washing the Body

Use mild soap and work up a lather on the wash cloth. Start with your baby's neck and wash the back, tummy, arms, and fingers. Rinse the wash cloth, then rinse the area just washed with water. Again, wash the legs and feet. Repeat the rinsing and lathering of the wash cloth. Clean your baby's diaper area beginning with front and moving to the buttocks. Rinse and dry your baby with a clean soft towel or hooded towel.



## After the Bath

1. Dry your baby well.
2. Dress your baby.

3. Comb or brush your baby's hair.
4. Clean your baby's fingernails and toenails with a wash cloth. Use baby clippers to clip the nails. It is important to keep your baby's nails short, so he or she will not get scratched.
5. If you desire, place lotion on the baby, except for the face. Baby powder, if used, should always be put below the waist level, especially with babies with lung problems. Use only corn starch. Never use powder and lotion together because they become caked and irritate your baby's skin.

## Special care

- **Cradle cap:** Your baby's head may appear dry, scaly or dirty looking. It is not due to infection or inadequate washing. It is thought to be caused by exposure to increased hormones before birth. It will not harm the baby and will go away.
  - ▶ To treat cradle cap, apply a small amount of baby oil and leave it on your baby's head overnight or at least 8 hours. Cover your baby's head with a soft knit hat or buy a "mattress saver" at your local baby store to prevent oil on sheets or clothing. Be sure to follow the instructions that come with the mattress saver as to how to safely attach it to the crib.
  - ▶ Comb the hair with a fine-toothed comb and shampoo. This may need to be repeated until the scalp looks clean and normal.
  - ▶ If after several days of doing this, the scalp does not improve, call your baby's health provider. Always wash and dry the baby's brush after each use.
- **Male Circumcision:** If your baby has been circumcised, be sure to follow instructions on how to clean and care for the circumcision. Gently pull back the remaining small portion of foreskin and clean. Do not forcibly pull the foreskin back.
  - ▶ No tub baths are permitted until the circumcision heals, generally in 1 to 2 weeks.
- **Females:** Always clean the genitals from front to back. Remember to clean between the folds of the genitals as well. This avoids getting stool from the rectum into the opening leading to the bladder. Infections of the urinary tract can be common in girls.