

Baby's Skin Care

Bathing

A bath two or three times a week during baby's first year is sufficient. More frequent bathing may dry out his skin.

You'll need the following items:

- a soft, clean washcloth
- mild, unscented baby soap and shampoo
- a soft brush
- towels or blankets
- an infant tub with 2 to 3 inches of warm — not hot! — water (to test the water temperature, feel the water with the inside of your elbow or wrist). An infant tub is a plastic tub that can fit in the bathtub; it's a better size for babies and makes bathing easier.
- a clean diaper
- clean clothes

Sponge baths

You should give your baby a sponge bath until:

- the umbilical cord falls off (one to four weeks)
- the circumcision heals (one to two weeks)
- the naval heals completely (one to four weeks)

For a sponge bath, pick a warm room and a flat surface, such as a changing table, floor or counter. Undress your baby. Wipe his eyes with a washcloth dampened with water only, starting with one eye and wiping from the inner corner to the outer corner. Use a clean corner of the washcloth to wash the other eye. Clean his nose and ears with the washcloth. Then wet the cloth again and, using a little soap, wash his face gently and pat it dry.

Next, using baby shampoo, create a lather and gently wash his head and rinse. Using a wet cloth and soap, gently wash the rest of his body, paying special attention to creases under the arms, behind the ears, around the neck and in the genital area. Once he is dry, you can diaper and dress him.

Tub baths

Undress your baby and place him in the tub immediately, in a warm room, to prevent chills. Make sure the water in the tub is no more than 2 to 3 inches deep, and that the water is no longer running. Use one of your hands to support his head and the other hand to guide him in feet-first.

Use a washcloth to wash his face and hair. Gently massage his scalp with the pads of your fingers or a soft baby hairbrush, including the area over the fontanelles (soft spots) on the top of the head. When rinsing, cup

your hand across his forehead so soap doesn't get into his eyes. Gently wash the rest of him with water and a small amount of soap.

Throughout the bath, pour water gently over his body so he doesn't get cold. After the bath, wrap him in a towel immediately, making sure to cover his head. Baby towels often come with hoods.

While bathing your infant, **never** leave him alone. If you need to leave the bathroom, wrap the baby in a towel and take him with you.

Other skin concerns

Diaper rash is common in infants. To prevent or heal diaper rash:

- Change diapers frequently, and as soon as possible after bowel movements.
- After cleaning the area with mild soap and water or a wipe, apply a diaper rash or "barrier" cream. Creams with zinc oxide are preferable because they form a barrier against moisture.
- Wash cloth diapers in dye- and fragrance-free detergents.
- Air the skin out by letting your baby go diaper free for part of the day.

If diaper rash continues for more than three days or seems to be getting worse, call your doctor because the rash could be a fungal infection that requires a prescription. See Tips to Grow By article "Diaper Rash" (IN217) for more advice.

Fingernails

Infants' fingernails can be long enough to scratch their skin as they bring their hands to their faces. Carefully trim your baby's nails straight across with a pair of small scissors.

Acne

Infant acne is a common skin condition that usually goes away on its own. Most babies who have it develop it when they're around 3 weeks old. It happens most often on the cheeks and forehead, but can also develop on the nose and scalp.

Doctors aren't sure what causes infant acne, but think it might be related to hormones or to a yeast that can live on the skin. It is not the same type of acne that older kids and adults get.

Most babies don't need treatment and it usually goes away on its own within a few weeks to a few months. In some cases, a doctor may prescribe a medicated cream to

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help treat the acne.

Washing your baby's face once a day with warm water and mild soap is usually all that's needed.