

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Can I really take care of the baby properly?

For thousands of years people have been taking care of babies. But it's different now—much different. Childbirth is safer. Babies are healthier. Parenting is easier—that is, many of the mechanical things are easier. On the other hand, babies still cry, take time to feed, and require changing. Sure, there's a lot to know and lots to do, but with love, common sense, and a few up-to-date guidelines, you are off to a great start.

How will I know everything is all right?

Perhaps having a new baby is something like getting a new car. It's been a long wait. Now everyone wants to look, listen, touch, lift, open, turn and look again to be sure that the parts are all there and working properly. More than likely everything is in order.

Did you know there are some 10,000,000,000-brain cells? Did you stop to think about the amazing heating, cooling, plumbing, pumping, and even reproductive systems? Someone counted up 525 muscles and estimated there are billions of specialized cells in a single baby. That's more parts than in a car or in just about anything you could buy. The amazing thing is that everything works so well most of the time. But, look things over and ask about anything you happen to wonder about. That beats worrying about something that may mean nothing.

What is a new baby supposed to look like?

A newly born baby may not be very attractive at first, with its coating of protective white, greasy vernix. But good news ... the looks quickly improve with age ... even a few minutes makes a difference, and soon the newborn really looks like the baby everyone has been waiting for.

Isn't the head a funny shape?

Maybe. It often is. To begin with, a baby's head is large in proportion to the rest of the body and seems to sit on the shoulders without much of a neck. If a baby's head were solid, birth would be very difficult. So actually, the head is made up of several bones which can do some giving and taking during birth. They don't join together until later. Thus, the head is shaped longer, rounder, or flatter depending on the baby's position during birth. At **first**, the forehead is often quite flat and sloped toward the back. Ridges and bumps can be felt where the bones overlap a little. Quite a bit of natural reshaping occurs in the **first** few days. Don't worry. The baby will look better in a day or so!

What are the soft spots?

There are two spots (*fontanel*s), which are places on the head where the bones have not yet come together. The posterior one is quite small and disappears rather soon, but the diamond-shaped fontanel on top of the head takes between nine to fifteen months to close. Go ahead, touch it ... and don't be afraid to wash the area vigorously at bath time ... you won't hurt anything.

How much does a baby see?

A baby can distinguish light from dark and can see close objects, but it will be some time before much focusing and consistent eye alignment occurs.

Will my baby really lose weight the first few days?

Yes, but the birth weight most always is regained within the first two weeks.

Will the pink marks on the eyelids go away?

These light-pink blotches will eventually disappear, but it may take some time. There's no worry or hurry.

Should matted eyes be washed?

Yes, with plain water. If eye discharge persists, call our office.

Does a baby's name make much difference?

Maybe not now, but it might make a lot of difference later. A little time choosing a name might avoid some teasing about a particular combination of initials for names. Is a name a “plus” or a “minus”? Will it be strange and difficult for future playmates to say? Think about nicknames. What about the spelling? Is there something about a name that may cause a youngster (*or grownup*) embarrassment or difficulty and confusion? A name lasts a long time. It’s worth thinking about.

Is jealousy of a new baby inevitable?

If you had been in the center-stage spotlight and were suddenly displaced, would you like it? Neither does a three year old or a child of any age, who suddenly feels unimportant. Sometimes even a father feels a little jealous about all the attention the baby is getting ... perhaps rightly so. Remember that others in the family need to continue getting attention, affection, and love after the baby comes. Just suppose you are three-year-old Steven: For all of Steven’s life there has been just the right number of people at home-mom, dad ... and Steven. Then the word gets out a competitor is on the way to share his house, his room, his yard, his toys ... and even his mom and dad. To make matters worse, the intruder comes after a poorly explained absence of Mother. For all Steven knows, mother may disappear again and may return with a mountain goat, giraffe, alligator, monster, or another baby! Of course Steven is going to resent competition. But by making him feel important, and part of the new event ... letting him anticipate the arrival of “his” new baby ... and with some new privileges ... and with a promotion from “private” to “corporal”... and maybe by receiving the first words of greeting when grandma comes to visit...along with some special solo time and attention from dad and mom...maybe Steven might even like the new baby...some of the time.

Must a baby have a bowel movement everyday?

No. Quite normally babies may have several stools each day and then suddenly go two, three, or even four days without a bowel movement. More worry is wasted about bowel movements than any other part of baby care. Don’t. It’s expected for a baby to push, strain, draw their legs up, cry, and get red when they have a bowel movement. Avoid laxatives. Unless the stools are rock-hard, the baby is not constipated.

When does the “cord” come off?

The umbilical cord, no longer being necessary, begins drying up right after being cut at birth. The remaining part will drop off in 10-14 days.

How do you care for the cord and navel?

Clean around the cord several times a day with a cotton swab dipped in alcohol. When the cord comes off, do this vigorously in the navel. A little moist secretion and a few drops of blood may be present. However, more drainage (*especially with a bad smell*) or redness around the cord base is cause for concern.

How about a bellyband?

Bellybands, tape and bindings are not advisable or helpful even if there is some pouching out of the navel.

What about care after a circumcision?

Keep the area clean. A little petroleum jelly may be desirable to reduce irritation for the first two or five days. That’s about it.

Is mottled skin a worry?

No. Babies’ skin may from time to time appear mottled. This pink-and-white pattern may come and go without worry.

Should fingernails be cut?

Are the fingernails long? Is the baby scratching himself, or you? If so, file the nails, **DO NOT USE NAIL CLIPPERS.**

What about colic?

A daily fussy period is expected, often in the evening. First, be sure the baby isn’t being overfed. Then if getting rid of swallowed air and other simple comforting measures don’t solve the problem, your doctor will give you some suggestions to help settle the baby down. Don’t forget that soothing music often helps to calm babies and everyone else.

How do I know when the baby is hungry?

If it's been a while since the last feeding and the baby starts yelling, it's a pretty good assumption that the baby wants to eat. In other words, a demand schedule makes more sense than feeding a baby on a strict clock schedule. But, remember, babies cry for reasons other than hunger!!! Babies usually do not need to be fed every 1-2 hours.

Can a baby really get too much milk?

The mark of success at one time was to see how big and fat a baby could be. It isn't. It's easy to mistake hunger for fussiness or crying from a tummy too full of milk or swallowed air. Yes, a baby really can get too much milk... that can result in irritability, vomiting, diarrhea, and eventually a fat baby. Be sure swallowed air is burped-up during, after, and in-between feedings.

Does it hurt a baby to cry?

It depends on what's going on. Some mothers won't let their babies cry for a single minute. They drop everything and run at the **first** whimper, which doesn't make sense. On the other hand, crying may mean, "Hey mom, I'm wet", or "How about changing this messy diaper," or "I've been swallowing some air and have a tummy-ache. Sit me up in your arms and burp me!" An over-filled or empty stomach may also cause crying, or maybe the baby is just tired and needs to cry himself to sleep. All babies are going to do some crying.

Do the ears work yet?

Yes. You will notice that the baby responds to loud voices and noises. By the way, quiet music is soothing to a baby.

Is hiccupping a bad sign?

No, most healthy new babies have periodic episodes of hiccupping, which cause no difficulty at all.

Why do the baby's breasts look large?

A hormone causes breast enlargement in a baby girl or boy from the mother. There is no cause for concern even when a little milk-like discharge is produced. The swelling goes down soon.

How do you clean a little girl's genitalia?

It is important to separate the labial folds when washing a baby girl. Otherwise, the two sides may stick together forming "adhesions" that will have to be separated. (*These adhesions have nothing to do with the hymen.*) Incidentally, a little vaginal secretion and even bleeding sometimes occurs at a week or so of age, which is no cause for concern. This is another quickly passing effect of mother's hormones.

Why didn't my baby want to eat at feeding time?

If you were awakened at 3:00 a.m., would you be excited about eating a hamburger with onions? NOT LIKELY. By the same token, it is seldom necessary to get a baby up to eat. If a baby wakes up hungry, that's a different question!

Remember

When the nurse brings your baby to you all cuddled up in their blanket, he may look pretty helpless, but he really isn't. He is a regular little dynamo, full of possibilities and already going full speed toward his future. He is growing and changing every hour.

Every baby changes and grows in the same orderly manner. Just now, your baby is in the very early stages of his development. He can see and follow a moving light with his eyes soon after birth. His senses of touch, taste, and smell are in fairly good working order, and he can hear noises quite well. He will startle at a loud noise and stop his crying at the sound of your soothing voice. He will learn to know you through his senses right from the start.

Your baby is fully formed, but the pathways to the outer world are not yet developed. His only way of getting attention is his loud cry, which he can turn on automatically whenever he feels hungry, wet, cold, frightened or perhaps when his arms or legs are restrained forcibly in an uncomfortable position.

In this early stage of development, your baby doesn't cry because he is "bad" or "spoiled". A baby cries because he needs something. Your job (*and ours*) is to find out what that something is, if we possibly can.

What does your baby need right now? A comfortable crib, freedom to stretch and move, proper food, and the feeling of comfort that you give him. It is very comforting to him when he can cuddle up safe in your arms and go to sleep after feeding.

In general, a baby's development may be thought of as beginning at the head and progressing toward the feet. A baby learns to smile before he learns to reach out; he learns to reach out before he learns to sit and stand. Gradually, he will be able to smile, to hold his rattle, to sit up, to crawl, to stand, to step out and to walk.

ENJOY YOUR BABY!