

# GETTING TO KNOW YOUR BABY



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There is something very special and exciting about being alone for the first time with your new baby, but it's only natural to feel a bit anxious too. There is so much to learn, especially in the first few weeks, and the responsibility can seem overwhelming. But there is plenty of advice and support available. This chapter gives you the basic information you will need to cope with – and enjoy – the early days with your baby, and tells you where to go for extra support. There is more on how having a baby changes your life in Chapter 9.



## Understanding your baby

I need you to:

- Look at me.
- Be proud of me.
- Understand me.
- Respond to me.
- Comfort me.
- Enjoy me.
- Be patient with me.
- Protect me.

The first year of life is an important time to build a relationship with your baby.

Research has proven that bonding with your baby creates the foundation of a secure base in his or her later life. This improves their resilience, social skills and

confidence. Your baby will tell you what he feels and wants – watch out for his or her cues.

- Encourage your baby to look into your eyes.
- Enjoy a cuddle and skin to skin contact with your baby.
- Smile and respond with affection – your baby will copy you.
- Sing and tell nursery rhymes.
- Look at pictures and read a book together.
- Use everyday events to talk to your baby about what you are doing. Use short sentences.
- Don't be angry in front of your baby. Babies can pick up when you are tense or anxious.
- Babies whose cries are soothed tend to cry less, not more.
- Watch, wait and wonder.

## SLEEPING

Some babies sleep much more than others. Some sleep for long periods, others in short snatches. Some soon sleep right through the night, some don't for a long time. Your baby will have their own pattern of waking and sleeping, and it's unlikely to be the same as other babies you know.

It's also unlikely to fit in with your need for sleep. Try to follow your baby's lead. If you are breastfeeding, in the early weeks your baby is quite likely to doze off for short periods during the feed. Carry on feeding until you think your baby has finished, or until they are fully asleep. This is a good opportunity to try to get a bit of rest yourself.

If you are not sleeping at the same time as your baby, don't worry about keeping the house silent



### Interacting with your baby

Interacting with your baby doesn't just help you bond; it also helps your baby's brain to grow and develop. By looking, smiling, playing and talking to your baby, you are standing them in good stead for later life. Spending time with your baby will also help you understand their needs and recognise when they need to feed, sleep or have a cuddle. As time goes on, spending time together will help your child learn how to understand their own emotions and form strong relationships with other people.

### Help and support

See page 89 for more information about getting into a good sleeping routine and tackling sleeping problems in older babies and children. Cry-sis, the organisation for parents of crying babies, also offers help with sleeping problems (see page 183 for contact details). If you have twins, triplets or more, contact the Multiple Births Foundation and the Twins and Multiple Births Association (Tamba) for information about sleeping, including guidance on how more than one baby can share a cot safely (see page 35 for contact details).

while they sleep. It's good to get your baby used to sleeping through a certain amount of noise. It's also a good idea to teach your baby from the start that night-time is different to daytime. During night feeds you may find it helpful:

- to keep the lights down low
- not to talk much, and keep your voice quiet
- not to change your baby unless they need it.



### Helpful tips

#### Coping with disturbed nights

Disturbed nights can be very hard to cope with. If you have a partner, get them to help. If you are formula feeding, encourage your partner to share the feeds. (If you are breastfeeding, ask your partner to take over the early morning changing and dressing so you can go back to sleep.) Once you are into a good breastfeeding routine, your partner could occasionally give a bottle of expressed

breastmilk during the night. If you are on your own, you could ask a friend or relative to stay for a few days so that you can sleep.

Current advice is that the safest place for your baby to sleep is on their back in a cot in a room with you for the first six months.

Particularly in the early weeks, you may find that your baby only falls asleep in your or your partner's arms, or when you are standing by the cot.

## Reducing the risk of cot death/sudden infant death

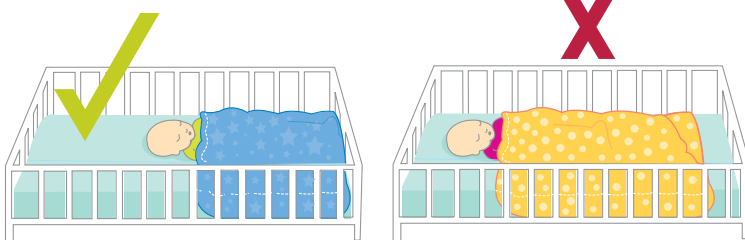
Sadly, we don't know why some babies die suddenly and for no apparent reason from what is called 'cot death' or Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). But we do know that placing a baby to sleep on their back reduces the risk, and that exposing a baby to cigarette smoke or overheating a baby increases the risk.

All the advice that we now have for reducing the risk of cot death and other dangers, such as suffocation, is listed below. Remember that cot death is rare, so don't let worrying about it stop you enjoying your baby's first few months. But do follow the advice below to reduce the risks as much as possible.

To reduce the risk of cot death:

- **Place your baby on their back to sleep, in a cot in a room with you.**
- **Do not smoke in pregnancy or let anyone smoke in the same room as your baby.**
- **Do not share a bed with your baby.**
- **Never sleep with your baby on a sofa or armchair.**
- **Do not let your baby get too hot – keep your baby's head uncovered.**
- **Place your baby in the 'feet to foot' position.**
- **Ensure your baby is lying on a firm safety mattress.**

**Put your baby feet to foot in the crib.**



## Place your baby on their back to sleep

Place your baby on their back to sleep from the very beginning for both day and night sleeps. This will reduce the risk of cot death. Side sleeping is not as safe as sleeping on the back. Healthy babies placed on their backs are less likely to choke. When your baby is old enough to roll over, they should not be prevented from doing so.

Babies may get flattening of the part of the head they lie on (plagiocephaly). This will become rounder again as they grow, particularly if they are encouraged to lie on their tummies to play when they are awake and being supervised. Experiencing a range of different positions and a variety of movement while awake is also good for a baby's development.

## The risks of bed sharing

The safest place for your baby to sleep is in a cot in a room with

**The safest place for your baby to sleep is on their back in a cot in a room with you for the first six months.**

you for the first six months. **Do not share a bed with your baby if you or your partner:**

- **are smokers (no matter where or when you smoke and even if you never smoke in bed)**
- **have recently drunk alcohol**
- **have taken medication or drugs that make you sleep more heavily**
- **feel very tired.**

The risks of bed sharing are also increased if your baby:

- **was premature (born before 37 weeks), or**
- **was of low birth weight (less than 2.5kg or 5.5lb).**

There is also a risk that you might roll over in your sleep and suffocate your baby, or that your baby could get caught between the wall and the bed, or could roll out of an adult bed and be injured.



## Never sleep with a baby on a sofa or armchair

**It's lovely to have your baby with you for a cuddle or a feed but it's safest to put your baby back in their cot before you go to sleep.**

If you have questions or want to more information on reducing the risk of cot death, contact the Foundation For Study of Infant Deaths (FSLD). Freephone helpline 0808 8026868. Email: [helpline@fslld.org.uk](mailto:helpline@fslld.org.uk) Website: [www.fslld.org.uk](http://www.fslld.org.uk)



### Cut out smoking during pregnancy – partners too!

Smoking in pregnancy greatly increases the risk of cot death. It is best not to smoke at all.

If you are pregnant and want to give up, visit [www.want2stop.info](http://www.want2stop.info)

### Don't smoke near your baby.

#### Don't let anyone smoke in the same room as your baby

Babies exposed to cigarette smoke after birth are also at an increased risk of cot death. Nobody should smoke in the house, including visitors. Anyone who needs to smoke should go outside. Do not take your baby into smoky places. If you are a smoker, sharing a bed with your baby increases the risk of cot death.

#### Don't let your baby get too hot (or too cold)

Overheating can increase the risk of cot death. Babies can overheat because of too much bedding or clothing, or because the room is too hot.

When you check your baby, make sure they are not too hot. If your baby is sweating or their tummy feels hot to the touch, take off some of the bedding. Don't worry if your baby's hands or feet feel cool – this is normal.

- It is easier to adjust the temperature with changes of lightweight blankets. Remember, a folded blanket counts as two blankets.
- Babies do not need hot rooms; all-night heating is rarely necessary. Keep the room at a temperature that is comfortable for you at night. About 18°C (65°F) is comfortable.
- If it is very warm, your baby may not need any bedclothes other than a sheet.
- Even in winter, most babies who are unwell or feverish do not need extra clothes.
- Babies should never sleep with a hot-water bottle or electric blanket, next to a radiator, heater or fire, or in direct sunshine.
- Babies lose excess heat from their heads, so make sure their heads cannot be covered by bedclothes during sleep periods.



### Don't let your baby overheat.

#### Don't let your baby's head become covered

Babies whose heads are covered with bedding are at an increased risk of cot death. To prevent your baby wriggling down under the covers, place your baby feet to foot in the crib, cot or pram.

Make the covers up so that they reach no higher than the shoulders. Covers should be securely tucked in so they cannot slip over the baby's head. Use one or more layers of lightweight blankets.

Sleep your baby on a mattress that is firm, flat, well fitting and clean. The outside of the mattress should be waterproof. Cover the mattress with a single sheet.

Remember, do not use duvets, quilts, baby nests, wedges, bedding rolls or pillows as it increases the risk of cot death.

### Remove hats and extra clothing as soon as you come indoors or enter a warm car, bus or train, even if it means waking your baby.



## Feeding

Breastfeeding your baby reduces the risk of cot death. See Chapter 1 for everything you need to know about breastfeeding.

It is possible that using a dummy at the start of any sleep period reduces the risk of cot death. Do not begin to give a dummy until breastfeeding is well established, usually when your baby is around one month old. Stop giving the dummy when your baby is between six and 12 months old.

## If your baby is unwell, seek MEDICAL advice promptly

Babies often have minor illnesses that you do not need to worry about.

Make sure your baby drinks plenty of fluids and is not too hot. If your baby sleeps a lot, wake them regularly for a drink.

It can be difficult to judge whether an illness is more serious and requires prompt medical attention. See the section on recognising the signs of illness (page 35) for guidance on when you should get help.

## More information

For more information on reducing the risk of cot death, or to buy a simple room thermometer for your baby, contact the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths (FSID):

Telephone: 020 7802 3200  
Email: [office@fsid.org.uk](mailto:office@fsid.org.uk)  
Website: [www.fsid.org.uk](http://www.fsid.org.uk)

## CRYING

All babies cry – and some cry a lot! Crying is your baby's way of showing that they need comfort and care. Sometimes it's easy to work out what they want and sometimes it is not. You might find that there are some times of the day when your baby tends to cry a lot, and cannot be comforted. Early evenings is the most common time for this to happen. This can be hard on you as it's often the time when you are most tired and least able to cope.

While some crying is perfectly normal, there is usually a reason for excessive crying. You could try some of the following ideas to help comfort your baby. Some may be more effective than others.

- If you are breastfeeding, let your baby suckle at your breast.

- If you are formula feeding, give your baby a dummy. Sterilise dummies as you would bottles. To avoid tooth decay, don't dip them in anything sweet. Some babies find their thumb instead. Later, some will use a bit of cloth as a comforter; you can wash this as often as you need.
- Hold your baby or put them in a sling, so that they are close to you. Move about gently, sway and dance, talk to them and sing.
- Try rocking your baby backwards and forwards in the pram, or go out for a walk or a drive. Lots of babies like to sleep in cars, and even if they wake up again the minute you stop, at least you will have had a break.
- Find something to listen to or look at – music on the radio or a CD, a rattle or a mobile above the cot.
- Try stroking your baby's back firmly and rhythmically, holding them against you or lying face downwards on your lap. Or undress your baby and massage with baby oil, gently but firmly. Talk soothingly as you do it.

Make sure the room is warm enough. Some clinics run baby massage courses – ask your midwife or health visitor.

- Try a warm bath. This calms some babies instantly, but makes others cry even more. It's worth a try, though.
- Sometimes, rocking and singing can keep your baby awake. You might find that lying them down after a feed will help.
- Ask your health visitor or pharmacist for advice.

## needing comfort





### Helpful tips

#### Crying during feeds

Some babies cry a lot and seem unsettled around the time of a feed. If you are breastfeeding, you may find that improving your baby's attachment helps them to settle. You can go to a breastfeeding centre or drop-in and ask for help, or talk to your peer supporter or health visitor.

If this doesn't work, try keeping a note of when the crying happens to see if there is a pattern. It may be that something you are eating or drinking is affecting your baby. Some things will reach your milk within a few hours; others may take 24 hours. All babies are different and what affects one will not necessarily affect yours. But drinks and food you might want to think about include drinks containing caffeine, fruit squashes, diet drinks, dairy products and chocolate.

Talk to your health visitor, contact your local breastfeeding support group.

## Colic

Excessive crying could be a sign that your baby has colic. Everyone agrees that colic exists but no one knows what causes it. Some doctors think it's a kind of stomach cramp, and it does seem to cause the kind of crying that might go with waves of stomach pain – miserable and distressed, stopping for a moment or two, then starting up again. The crying can go on for some hours and there may be little you can do except try to comfort your baby and wait for the crying to pass.

If you are concerned, talk to your health visitor or GP. It can be a good idea to make a list of the questions you want to ask ('Is my baby poorly?' 'Is there anything I can do to ease my baby's pain?') so you don't forget anything. It can help if you keep a record of how often and when your baby cries, for example after every feed or during the evening. This can help your GP or health visitor to diagnose the problem.

Keeping a record can also help you identify the times when you need extra help. You could also think about possible changes to your routine. For example, if your baby tends to cry a lot in the afternoon and you have got into the habit of going out in the morning, try going out in the afternoon instead and see if that helps.

Coping with a colicky baby is extremely stressful. If nothing helps, ask your GP or health visitor if they can refer you to a paediatrician. Otherwise, it's just a question of hanging on as best you can. It may be hard to imagine, but

this stage should only last a few weeks at the most. It may also help to remind yourself that you are not causing the crying and it's not under your control. When you can, take some time out for yourself – even just handing over to someone else for long enough to have a hot soak in the bath in the evening can help. Having a decent meal every day will help you to keep up your energy levels. If a crying baby takes up your whole evening, you could try and make lunch your main meal.

## Preventing non-accidental head injuries

It can feel very stressful when your baby is crying. Staying relaxed and being able to sooth your crying baby makes a big difference.

Babies are very vulnerable to being shaken in the first few months of their life. At this age, head injuries are the most common cause of non-accidental death or disability.

Never shake your baby. If you are feeling very stressed, put your baby down in a safe place like a pram or a cot. Go into another room. As long as your baby is safe just focus on feeling calm.





## A warning cry

Although all babies cry sometimes, there are times when crying may be a sign of illness. Watch out for any sudden changes in the pattern or sound of your baby's crying. Often, there will be a simple explanation: for example, if you have been going out more than usual, your baby might simply be overtired. But if you think there is something wrong, follow your instincts and contact your GP. See Chapter 8 for more information on what to do if you think your baby is ill.



There may be times when you are so tired and angry you feel like you cannot take any more. This happens to lots of parents, so don't be ashamed to ask for help. Think about handing your baby over to someone else for an hour. It's really hard to cope alone with a constantly crying baby. You need someone who will give you a break, at least occasionally, to calm down and get some rest. If that is not possible, put your baby in their cot or pram, make sure they are safe, close the door, go into another room, and do what you can to calm yourself down. Set a time limit – say, 10 minutes – then go back.

Talk to a friend, your health visitor or doctor. Or contact Cry-sis (see page 181) – they can put you in touch with other parents who have been in the same situation. See page 28 for more ideas.

No matter how frustrated you feel, **you must never shake your baby**. Shaking moves their head violently and can cause bleeding and brain damage.

If you have more than one baby, you may find it helpful to talk through your problems with Twinline (0800 138 0509). If nothing works, ask your midwife, health visitor or GP to check whether there is a reason why your baby will not stop crying.

Remember, this difficult time will not last forever. Your baby will gradually start to take more interest in what is going on around them and the miserable, frustrated crying will almost certainly stop.

## WASHING AND BATHING

### Washing

You don't need to bath your baby every day but you should wash their face, neck, hands and bottom carefully every day. This is often called 'topping and tailing'. Choose a time when your baby is awake and contented and make sure the room is warm. Get everything ready beforehand. You will need a bowl of warm water, a towel, cotton wool, a fresh nappy and, if necessary, clean clothes.

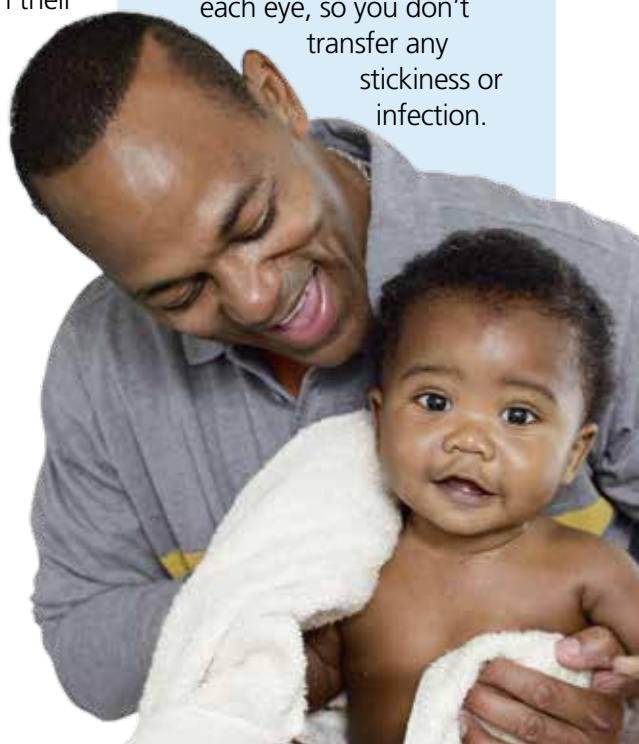
**The following might be useful as a step-by-step guide:**

#### STEP 1

Hold your baby on your knee, or lie them on a changing mat, and take off all their clothes apart from their vest and nappy then wrap them in a towel.

#### STEP 2

Dip the cotton wool in the water (make sure it doesn't get too wet) and wipe gently around your baby's eyes from the nose outward, using a fresh piece of cotton wool for each eye, so you don't transfer any stickiness or infection.



**STEP 3**

Use another fresh piece of cotton wool to clean around your baby's ears (but not inside them). Never use cotton buds inside the ear canal. Wash the rest of your baby's face, neck and hands in the same way and dry them gently with the towel.

**STEP 4**

Take off the nappy and wash your baby's bottom (genitals), with fresh cotton wool and warm water. Dry your baby very carefully including in skin folds and put on a clean nappy.

**STEP 5**

It will help your baby to relax if you keep talking while you wash them. The more they hear your voice, the more they will get used to listening to you and start to understand what you are saying.

**healthy  
and  
clean**

**Bathing**

Babies only need a bath two or three times a week, but if your baby really enjoys it, bath them every day.

Don't bath your baby straight after a feed or when they are hungry or tired and make sure the room is warm. Have everything you need at hand – a baby bath or washing-up bowl filled with warm water, two towels (in case of accidents!), baby bath liquid (unless your baby has particularly dry skin), a clean nappy, clean clothes and cotton wool.

**STEP 1**

**The water should be warm, not hot.** Check it with your wrist or elbow and mix it well so there are no hot patches. Hold your baby on your knee and clean their face, following the instructions given under 'Washing'. Wash their hair next with water or a liquid soap or shampoo designed for babies and rinse carefully, supporting them over the bowl. Once you have dried their hair gently, you can take off their nappy, wiping away any mess.

**STEP 2**

Lower your baby gently into the bowl or bath using one hand to hold their upper arm and support their head and shoulders. Keep your baby's head clear of the water. Use the other hand to gently swish the water over your baby without splashing.

**Never leave your baby alone in the bath, not even for a second.**

**STEP 3**

Lift your baby out and pat them dry, paying special attention to the creases. This is a good time to massage some oil or cream (not aqueous cream) into your baby's skin. Don't use anything that contains peanut oil, as some babies are allergic to it. Lots of babies love being massaged and it can help them relax and sleep. It's best if you lay your baby on a towel on the floor as both the baby and your hands can get slippery.

If your baby seems frightened of bathing and cries, you could try bathing together. Make sure the water is not too hot. It's easier if someone else holds your baby while you get in and out of the bath.







## NAPPIES

### What is in a nappy?

#### What should my baby's poo (stools) look like?

Your baby's first poo will be made up of something called meconium. This is sticky and greenish black. After a few days, the poo will change to a yellow or mustard colour. Breastfed babies' poo is runny and doesn't smell; formula-fed babies' poo is firmer, darker brown and more smelly. Some infant formulas can also make poo dark green. If you change from breast to formula feeding, you will find your baby's poo becomes darker and more paste-like.

#### How often should my baby pass a poo?

Some babies fill their nappies at or around every feed. Some, especially breastfed babies, can go for several days or even up to a week without

a bowel movement. Both are quite normal. It's also normal for babies to strain or even cry when passing a poo. Your baby is not constipated provided their poo is soft, even if they have not passed one for a few days.

#### Is it normal for my baby's poo to change?

From day to day or week to week your baby's poo will probably vary a bit. But if you notice a marked change of any kind, such as the poo becoming very smelly, very watery or harder, particularly if there is blood in it, you should talk to your doctor or health visitor. Very pale poo may be a sign of **jaundice**. See page 37 for more information.

### Changing nappies

Some babies have very delicate skin and need changing the minute they wet themselves, otherwise their skin becomes sore and red. Others are tougher and get along fine with a change before or after every feed. All babies need to be changed as soon as possible when they are dirty, both to prevent nappy rash and to stop them smelling awful!

#### Getting organised

Get everything you need in one place before you start. The best place to change a nappy is on a changing mat or towel on the floor, particularly if you have more than one baby. That way, if you take your eye off the baby for a moment to look after another child, the baby cannot fall and hurt themselves.

Try to sit down, so you don't hurt your back. If you are using a changing table, keep an eye on your baby at all times.

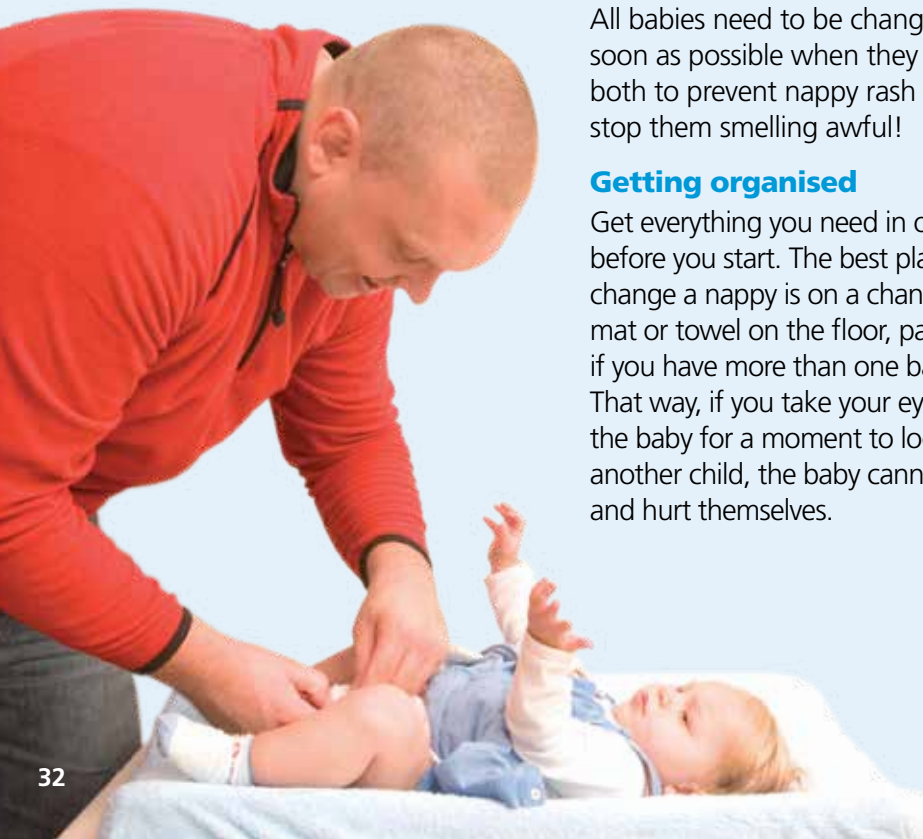
Make sure you have a good supply of nappies – there is nothing worse than running out! If you are using cloth nappies, it might take a little while to get used to how they fold and fit. There are several types of washable nappies available. Some have a waterproof backing and others have a separate waterproof nappy cover. They fasten with either Velcro or poppers. Biodegradable, flushable nappy liners can be useful as they protect the nappy from heavy soiling and can be flushed away.

You will need a supply of cotton wool and a bowl of warm water or baby lotion, or baby wipes. It's also a good idea to make sure you have a spare set of clothes handy, especially in the first few weeks.

#### Getting started

If your baby is dirty, use the nappy to clean off most of it. Then, use the cotton wool and warm water (or baby lotion or baby wipes) to remove the rest and get your baby really clean. Girls should be cleaned from front to back to avoid getting germs into the vagina. Boys should be cleaned around the testicles (balls) and penis, and the foreskin can be pulled back very gently to clean.

It's just as important to clean carefully when you are changing a wet nappy.



If you like, you can use a barrier cream to help protect against nappy rash (see right). Some babies are sensitive to these creams and thick creams may clog nappies or make them less absorbent. Ask your pharmacist or health visitor for advice.

Washable nappies should be pre-washed to make them softer. Make sure you choose the right size nappy and cover for your baby's weight. Put in a nappy liner, then fasten the nappy on your baby, adjusting it to fit snugly round the waist and legs.

If you are using disposable nappies, take care not to get water or cream on the sticky tabs as they will not stick.



It can help to chat to your baby while you are changing them. Pulling faces, smiling and laughing with your baby will help you bond, and help their development.



## Nappy rash

Most babies get nappy rash at some time in the first 18 months. Nappy rash can be caused by:

- prolonged contact with urine or poo
- sensitive skin
- rubbing or chaffing
- soap, detergent or bubble bath
- baby wipes, and
- diarrhoea or other illness.

There may be red patches on your baby's bottom, or the whole area may be red. The skin may look sore and be hot to touch and there may be spots, pimples or blisters.

The best way to deal with nappy rash is to try and avoid your baby getting it in the first place. These simple steps will help:

- Change wet or soiled nappies as soon as possible. Young babies can need changing as many as 10 or 12 times a day, and older babies at least six to eight times.
- Clean the whole nappy area thoroughly, wiping from front to back. Use plain water, or specially formulated baby lotion.
- Lie your baby on a towel and leave the nappy off for as long and as often as you can to let fresh air get to the skin. Use a barrier cream, such as zinc and castor oil.

If your baby does get nappy rash, you can treat it with a nappy rash cream. Ask your health visitor or pharmacist to recommend one. Your baby may have a thrush infection if the rash doesn't go away, or they develop a persistent bright red moist rash with white or red pimples which spreads to the folds of the skin. You will need to use an antifungal cream, available either from the pharmacist or on prescription from your GP. Ask your pharmacist or health visitor for advice.

## Nappy hygiene

Put as much of the contents as you can down the toilet. If you are using nappies with disposable liners, the liner can be flushed away. Don't try to flush the nappy itself in case you block the toilet.

Disposable nappies can be rolled up and resealed, using the tabs. Put them in a plastic bag kept only for nappies, then tie it up and put it in an outside bin.

Washable cloth nappies can be machine washed at 60°C, or you could try a local nappy laundry service.

Remember to wash your hands after changing a nappy and before doing anything else to avoid infection.



## Helpful tips

### Nappy services: the bottom line

If you use disposable nappies, it's worth finding out whether there are any local shops offering a delivery service.

If you have opted for washable cloth nappies, you could think about using a nappy laundry service. The cost of buying and washing cloth nappies for two-and-a-half years will range from around £185 to around £352, depending on the type of nappy you use.

Nappy laundry services typically cost from £6 to £9 per week. The cost of disposable nappies over the same period ranges from £463 to £732.



A nappy laundry service will take away the soiled nappies and deliver a fresh batch each week. Nappies are washed to hospital disinfection standards and thoroughly rinsed to protect your baby's skin. The service will supply everything you need, including nappies, nappy covers, liners and lidded nappy bins.

## TAKING YOUR BABY OUT

Your baby is ready to go out as soon as you feel fit enough to go yourself.



### Walking

Walking is good for both of you. It may be easiest to take a tiny baby in a sling. If you use a buggy, make sure your baby can lie down with their back flat.

### Travelling by car

It's illegal for anyone to hold a baby while sitting in the front or back seat of a car. The only safe way for your baby to travel in a car is in a properly secured, backward-facing baby seat, or in a carrycot (not a Moses basket) with the cover on and secured with special straps.

If you have a car with airbags in the front, your baby **should not travel in the front seat**, even if they are facing backwards, because of the danger of suffocation if the bag inflates.



Some areas have special schemes where you can borrow a suitable baby seat when you and your baby first return from hospital. Ask your midwife or health visitor.

### Coping with the weather

Babies get cold very easily, so they should be well wrapped up in cold weather. Take the extra clothing off if you go into a warm place so that your baby doesn't then overheat. You need to do this even if your baby is asleep.

In hot weather, babies and children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the sun, as their skin is thinner and they may not be able to produce enough of the pigment called melanin to protect them from sunburn and the risk of future skin cancer. Babies and children with fair or red hair, blue eyes and freckles are especially at risk.

Babies under six months should be kept out of the sun altogether. Protect older children by putting them in loose clothing and using high protection sunscreen high SPF25 or greater and UVA 4 or 5 star (more information go [www.careinthesun.org/youngpeople/early-years](http://www.careinthesun.org/youngpeople/early-years)) on any exposed skin. See page 113 for more tips on protecting your child from the sun.

## Helpful tips

### Carrying your baby

When you carry your baby in either a car seat or a baby seat, try not to hold it with just one hand as this can put a strain on your muscles and joints and give you backache. Instead, hold the seat close to you with both hands.





## TWINS, TRIPLETS OR MORE

Parents with one child often think that caring for twins is pretty much the same thing, just doubled! If you have twins (or triplets or more), you will know differently. Caring for twins, triplets or more is very different from caring for two babies or children of different ages. There is a lot more work involved, and you may need to find some different ways of doing things.

You will need as much support as you can get. If you have more than two babies, your local council may be able to provide a home help. A few hours' help with housework each week can make a big difference. The charity Home-Start also provides help for families. Go to [www.home-start.org.uk](http://www.home-start.org.uk) or call 0800 068 6368. Your health visitor will know what is available locally and can help put you in touch with local services.

You might find it useful to talk to other parents with more than one baby. The Twins and Multiple Births Association (Tamba) can provide information about local twins clubs,

where you can meet other parents who are in the same situation and get practical support and advice. Tamba's helpline, Twinline, is run by mothers with multiple babies. Call 0800 138 0509.

The Multiple Births Foundation also provides information and advice and can signpost other sources of help and support. Go to [www.multiplebirths.org.uk](http://www.multiplebirths.org.uk) or call 020 8383 3519.

The Parents Centre is a valuable source of information and support for parents with more than one baby. Go to [www.parentingni.org](http://www.parentingni.org)

## YOUR BABY'S HEALTH

### Screening and health checks

Over the first few months and years of their life, your baby will be offered a series of tests, assessments and opportunities for contact with health professionals as part of the new Healthy Child Programme. The table on page 36 explains what the tests are and tells you when they will happen.

For more information about any of these tests, or if you are worried about your baby or child's development, contact your health visitor or GP.

You can ask them to refer you to a paediatrician.

### More information

Find out more about screening programmes at [www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)

## Recognising the signs of illness

Babies often have minor illnesses. There is no need to worry about these. Make sure your baby drinks plenty of fluids and is not too hot. If your baby is sleeping a lot, wake them regularly for a drink.

If your baby has a more serious illness, it's important that you get medical attention as soon as possible. If your baby has any of the following symptoms, you should get **medical attention as soon as you can**:

- a high-pitched or weak cry, less responsive, much less active or more floppy than usual
- very pale all over, grunts with each breath and/or seems to be working hard to breathe
- takes less than a third of their usual amount of fluids, passes much less urine than usual, vomits green fluid, or passes blood in their poo (stools)
- a fever of 38°C or above (if they are less than three months old) or 39°C or above (if they are aged between three and six months)
- a dry mouth, no tears, sunken eyes or a sunken area at the soft spot on their head (all signs of dehydration), and/or
- a rash that doesn't disappear when you apply pressure.



## Screening and health checks

Age	Test	What is it?	Comments
<b>From one day</b>	Newborn hearing	A test to check whether your baby's hearing is normal	This can be done either before you go home from hospital, or at the clinic, and should be done by one month. See page 69 for more information
<b>Between one and three days</b>	Newborn physical examination	Screening of your baby's heart, hips and eyes (and testes in boys), plus a general physical examination	The test can be carried out by a 'baby doctor' or specially trained midwife. It doesn't have to be done before you leave hospital
<b>Between five and eight days</b>	Newborn bloodspot	A heel-prick blood test for phenylketonuria, congenital hypothyroidism, cystic fibrosis and sickle cell disorders	The heel-prick test screens for phenylketonuria (PKU), medium chain acyl-coA dehydrogenase deficiency (MCADD), congenital hypothyroidism (CHT), cystic fibrosis (CF) and sickle cell disorders (SCD). A number of other inherited metabolic conditions may be identified, eg homocystinuria. The Northern Ireland parental information leaflet and translations are available to view or download at <a href="http://www.publichealth.hscni.net">www.publichealth.hscni.net</a>
<b>Six to eight weeks</b>	Physical examination	Screening of your baby's heart, hips and eyes (and testes in boys), plus weighing and a general physical examination	You will also be asked whether your baby is being breast or formula fed
<b>Eight weeks onwards</b>	Immunisations		Immunisations are routinely offered at eight, 12 and 16 weeks, 12 and 13 months, and three years four months. See page 99 for more information
<b>Eight to 36 months</b>	General reviews		You may be offered a general review of your child's well-being at 14 to 16 weeks, 6 to 9 months, 12 months and again at around two to two-and-a-half years
<b>Four to five years</b>	School entry screening	Vision screening, height and weight check and hearing test	Your child may also be offered a general health review

### When it's urgent

You **must get immediate medical attention** if your baby:

- stops breathing
- is unconscious or seems unaware of what is going on
- will not wake up
- has a fit for the first time, even if they then seem to recover, or
- is struggling to breathe (for example, sucking in under the ribcage).

Dial 999 and ask for an ambulance.



## Sudden infant death (Cot death)

Remember, cot death is rare, so please don't let it worry you and stop you enjoying your baby's first few months. Research is continuing to help us understand more about cot death and, since parents and carers have been following the advice given on page 26, the number of babies dying has fallen by over 70%.

Some parents find it reassuring to use a breathing monitor. However, there is no evidence that these prevent cot death and normal, healthy babies do not need them. If you are worried, talk to your GP. You might want to discuss immunisation, as this has been shown to reduce the risk of cot death.

### Help and support

The Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths runs a helpline for parents and carers with questions about safe sleeping and reducing the risk of cot death. Call 020 7233 2090 or email [helpline@fsid.org.uk](mailto:helpline@fsid.org.uk)



## Jaundice

Jaundice is a yellowing of the skin and eyes. It happens when the liver cannot excrete enough of a chemical waste product called bilirubin. Some babies are born with jaundice and may need special care. Others can develop jaundice between two and four days after birth. It can last for up to two weeks.

If your baby develops jaundice in the first 24 hours after birth urgent medical treatment is required.

Otherwise, If your baby develops jaundice, talk to your midwife or health visitor. They can advise you whether or not you need to see your GP.

It's important to **carry on breastfeeding** if you can, as your milk can help clear the jaundice. Babies with jaundice are often sleepy and might not ask for feeds as often as they should (by day three, babies should be having eight or more feeds in 24 hours). You can help your baby by waking them regularly and encouraging them to feed. If you are advised to stop breastfeeding, express (and freeze) your milk until you can start breastfeeding again.

If your baby is still jaundiced after two weeks, go to your GP. They can refer you to a paediatrician, who may take a blood test to check the levels of the pigment that causes the yellowing.

You should also tell your midwife, doctor or health visitor if your baby is passing pale poo, even if your baby doesn't look jaundiced. They can arrange any tests your baby might need.

## Vitamin K deficiency

We all need vitamin K to make our blood clot properly so that we don't bleed too easily. Some newborn babies have too little vitamin K. Although this is rare, it can be dangerous, causing bleeding into the brain. This is called 'haemorrhagic disease of the newborn' or 'vitamin K deficiency bleeding' (VKDB). To reduce the risk, your baby can be given a dose of vitamin K through either a single injection or several doses by mouth. Ask your GP or midwife to talk you through the options.







### More information

For more information on antenatal and postnatal mental health and what you can expect from the health services, go to [www.nice.org/guidance/cg192](http://www.nice.org/guidance/cg192) NICE Guideline CG192. You may also find it helpful to contact the Association for Post-Natal Illness or the NCT, or log on to [www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com) (see the useful organisations section for contact details).

## YOUR HEALTH

During the first week after childbirth, many women get the 'baby blues'. Symptoms can include feeling emotional and irrational, bursting into tears for no apparent reason, feeling irritable or touchy or anxious and depressed.

These symptoms are probably caused by the sudden hormonal and chemical changes that happen after childbirth. They are perfectly normal and usually last for only a few days.

### Postnatal depression

Sometimes, though, the baby blues just will not go away. Postnatal depression is thought to affect around 1 in 10 women (and up to 4 in 10 teenage mothers). Although it's very common, many women suffer in silence.

Postnatal depression usually occurs two to eight weeks after the birth, although it can happen at any time

up to a year after your baby is born. Some of the symptoms, such as tiredness, irritability or poor appetite, are normal when you have just had a baby, but these are usually mild and don't stop you leading a normal life. With postnatal depression, you may feel increasingly depressed and despondent, and looking after yourself or your baby may become too much.

Some other signs of postnatal depression are:

- anxiety
- panic attacks
- sleeplessness
- aches and pains or feeling unwell
- memory loss or lack of concentration
- feeling like you cannot cope
- constant crying
- loss of appetite
- feelings of hopelessness
- not being able to enjoy anything, and/or
- loss of interest in your baby or over-anxiousness about your baby.

For more information about postnatal depression, see page 143.

Women with twins, triplets or more may suffer from postnatal and longer-term depression because of the extra stress of caring for more than one baby. Planning ahead, by getting information and advice on feeding and caring for two or more babies before they are born, can help prepare you to cope and give you more confidence. See page 35 for more on coping with twins, triplets and more.

### Help and support

Your health visitor can also put you in touch with your nearest postnatal group. This is a good way of meeting other mums and getting involved in social activities. Groups also offer help with parenting skills. Some areas have groups specifically for young parents.



If you think you may be suffering from postnatal depression, **don't struggle on alone**. It doesn't mean you are a bad mother or that you cannot cope. Postnatal depression is an illness, so ask for help just as you would if you had the flu or had broken your leg. Talk to someone you can trust, such as your partner or a friend, or ask your health visitor to call in and see you. Many health visitors have been trained to recognise postnatal depression and have been taught techniques for dealing with it. Even if they cannot help you, they will know someone in your area who can.

You should also see your GP. If you don't feel up to making an appointment, ask someone to do it for you or ask the doctor to visit you at home. Milder cases of postnatal depression can usually be dealt with by a health visitor or therapist. In more serious cases, your GP may prescribe anti-depressants. Some are safe to take while you are breastfeeding, so check that you are on the right one. Your GP may also refer you to a specialist.

### Puerperal psychosis

This is an extremely rare condition, affecting only one or two mothers in every thousand. You are more likely to be affected if you have severe mental illness or have a past history of severe mental illness, or if there is a family history of perinatal mental illness. Puerperal psychosis is a serious psychiatric illness, requiring urgent medical or hospital treatment. Usually, other people will notice the mother acting strangely.



Women suffering from puerperal psychosis should be admitted to a specialist mother and baby unit so they can be treated without being separated from their baby. Most women make a complete recovery, although this may take a few weeks or months.

### Post-traumatic stress disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can occur on its own or alongside postnatal depression. It's not clear why women develop PTSD, but there may be a link between the condition and feeling 'out of control' and/or being very frightened during the birth. Sometimes women worry that they might die, or that their baby might die.

The symptoms include:

- flashbacks
- nightmares
- panic attacks
- feeling emotionally 'numb'
- sleeping problems
- feeling irritable or angry, and/or
- irrational behaviour.

If you think you might be suffering from PTSD, you **must** talk to someone about how you are feeling. Your midwife, GP or health visitor will be able to advise you where to go for help. Don't be ashamed of how you are feeling. You are not alone, and remember, you **will** get better. Accepting that you need help is the first step towards recovery.

The Association for Post-Natal Illness and [www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com) can help. See pages 182 and 185 for contact details. They can offer information and advice, and put you in touch with other mothers who've experienced depression and know what it's like.

steps  
towards  
recovery

