

Bathing Baby

Bathing your baby can be an exciting milestone, but also an anxiety-causing experience. This is especially true during the first few weeks of life. Most babies are very fragile and quite slippery when wet. Your baby might not enjoy the experience much, either. However, when you prepare yourself fully for what lies ahead, you will start to feel more and more comfortable with the job of bathing your baby. For safety, set your thermostat on your hot water heater to 120° to prevent scalding.

Sponge Baths Are First Baths

Give your baby sponge baths until his (or her) umbilical cord falls off and his circumcision is healed. Gather a bowl, a washcloth, a towel, cotton balls, mild baby soap, a clean diaper, and a change of clothes. Fill the bowl with warm water. You can test the water's temperature with your elbow or wrist. Take the water and a washcloth to where you will be washing your baby. Pick a place that is not drafty or too cold. The umbilical cord should be kept clean and dry. The floor is the safest place, but any hard surface will do. Always keep one hand on your baby and do not leave your baby on a high surface even for a second.

How Often?

Most babies are overwashed. There is no need to give your baby a bath every day. In fact, bathing your newborn more than several times a week may dry out his skin. The face, neck, and diaper area are the parts that need attention. Cleaning your baby's face and neck with water after feedings and during diaper changes will help to make sure they stay fresh. If they are sweaty, wiping their armpits is helpful as well.

Choosing A Tub

After the sponge bath stage, the real fun begins. When you are ready for a tub bath, you have many options. You can use your bathtub, kitchen sink, or a plastic baby tub. Whatever you choose, line the tub with a foam liner, rubber mat, or folded towel to prevent your baby from slipping. It should be washed and dried after each use to prevent the growth of germs.

Before You Begin

Gather all your supplies near the tub. You will need a washcloth, a towel, cotton balls, mild baby soap, lotion, a clean diaper, and a change of clothes. NEVER leave your baby alone in a tub, even for a second. Many babies have drowned when their parents have stepped out for just a minute to answer a phone, doorbell, or even to get a towel. If you have to leave the bath area, wrap your baby up and take him with you.

Water Temperature and Amount

For safety, set your thermostat on your hot water heater to 120° to prevent scalding. Always check the water's temperature with your hand before bathing your baby. You will only need 2 or 3 inches of water. To keep your baby warm, bathe him in a warm room and pour warm (not hot) water over his body throughout the bath.

Holding the Baby

Support your baby's head and torso with your arm and hand. Wrap your arm under your baby's back, grasping him firmly under the armpit. When you clean your baby's back and buttocks, lean him or her forward on your arm. Continue to grasp your baby under the armpit.

Washing Baby's Hair

Shampooing your baby's hair once a week is enough for most babies. While supporting your baby's head and shoulders with your free hand, gently massage a drop of mild baby shampoo into your baby's scalp. Rinse the shampoo with a damp washcloth. To remove any cradle cap, the crusty, oily stuff on your baby's scalp, loosen the scales with a soft brush before rinsing off the shampoo. Brief, warm daily baths can be helpful if a diaper rash is present.

Soap

Plain water is fine for babies, but when necessary, use a mild moisturizing soap. When first using soap, test it on a small part of your baby's body and watch for redness or changes over the next few hours. Avoid scented detergent-type soaps and bubble baths. Baby's sensitive skin doesn't need powders or lotions, either. When drying your baby, make sure to dry the many creases and folds in his skin just as carefully as you washed them. Trapped moisture in these creases can lead to a rash. The best rash prevention is thoroughly drying your baby's skin after his bath. Avoid getting the soap in their eyes. Some babies need lotion as they get older – especially if they have eczema.

Thrush

Oral thrush is a very common yeast infection in babies. It causes irritation in and around a baby's mouth. Thrush can also affect fingernails, eyes, and skin folds of the neck and armpits, as well as the diaper area, including the vagina and folds of the groin. A baby with oral thrush might have cracked skin in the corners of the mouth or white patches on the lips, tongue, or inside the cheeks that look a little like cottage cheese but can't be wiped away. Some babies may not feed well or are uncomfortable when sucking because their mouth feels sore, but many babies don't feel any pain or discomfort. See your doctor if you think your baby may have thrush. Some cases go away without medical treatment within a week or two, but the doctor may prescribe an antifungal solution for your baby's mouth. Your baby might need to take the antifungal solution for a couple weeks and follow up as needed with the doctor.

Oral Care

It is important to wipe the babies gums off with a warm wet cloth after feeds to prevent future cavities. Never add juice, soda, or food items into bottles, unless advised to by a physician.

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Safety Checks

The most important part of your bathtime routine is safety. Accidents can happen anytime, but a few simple precautions can help prevent them. Use the following checklist to help prepare you and your home.

Safe Bathtubs	Safe Bathrooms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does your tub or shower have non-skid mats on the bottom to prevent slips?• Is your water heater set at 120 degrees or lower?• Do you always check the bath water temperature before bathing your baby? It should be less than 100 degrees. A good range is 85 to 90 degrees.• Do you bathe your child in the end of the tub opposite the faucet?• Are your tub faucets padded?• Is the area around your tub (and sink) free of all electrical appliances? Even appliances that are turned off but still plugged in can be dangerous.• Are there any breakable glass containers near the tub?• Do you store your personal razor near or in the bathtub?• Do you stay with your baby the entire time he is in the bathtub? Your baby can drown in only one inch of water.• Do you drain the water from the tub as soon as you are finished?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is your bathroom door kept closed?• Do you have toilet locks and cabinet locks installed?• Is the toilet seat down and locked? Babies can drown head-down in the toilet.• Do you have automatic night lights?• Are all poisonous items and medicines stored out of reach?• Do you use child resistant caps and put the caps back on when finished using the item?• Are you careful not to throw away razors and other dangerous items in your bathroom wastebasket?• Are you careful to dispose of medicine properly by giving to a prescription drug take back program or local pharmacy take back or crushing up pills and adding to ground coffee or kitty litter and sealing in a bag and throwing in trash? Check the internet for instructions for disposal of specific medicines (see websites in Resources below).• Poison Control hotline number 1-800-222-1222

Resources

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10. "Contact Us." Poison Control, 2024, www.poison.org/contact-us. Accessed 11 July 2024.