

The Normal Newborn

What to Expect

Most babies will sleep less or cry more than new parents expect. The average newborn sleeps 13 to 17 hours a day and may cry one to four hours a day. A very quiet or very active infant will sleep or cry more than an average baby. Crying can mean a baby is hungry, tired, hurting, too hot or too cold, or needs a diaper change. It may be the way the baby tells you of an emotional need to be held or the baby may be bored. As you get to know your baby, you will learn the difference between the cries. It is the baby's way of communicating with you.

Bathing and Cord Care

Sponge baths should be given until the cord is dry and falls off. The umbilical cord should be cleaned with every diaper change with alcohol on a cotton swab. Usually the cord falls off by two weeks after birth. Notify your doctor if red streaks appear around the cord or if it oozes.

Bowel Movements

The baby will have frequent bowel movements in the first few days that contain meconium. After a few days, the bowel movements change from tarry black of meconium to yellow. After the first few days, the baby may have a BM each time it eats. You will be taught how to diaper the baby during your hospital stay.

Car Seat Safety

The most important piece of baby equipment you will buy is a federally-approved car safety seat. Infants are required to ride in a rear-facing car seat (or car bed, depending on their weight) when they leave the hospital. The back seat of the car is the safest place for babies. Proper installation is critical. Many infant car seats come with a detachable base that stays strapped into the car when the carrier part is removed. Be sure the carrier always snaps firmly into place before driving. Some police and fire stations offer car seat safety inspections. To find an inspection station near you go to www.seatcheck.org. For more information, check www.nhtsa.gov and choose Child Safety Seat Information. By phone, call the Department of Transportation Vehicle Safety Hotline at (888) 327-4236.

Clothing

Dress the baby appropriately for the temperature. Use as many layers as you feel that you would need to be comfortable. Overdressing can cause excessive sweating and rashes. In cooler weather, use layers of clothing so you can add or remove clothing according to the temperature. Select clothing that allows easy access for changing diapers. Look for shirts that can be pulled over the baby's head easily. Babies grow quickly. Purchase only a few clothes for the first few months.

Sleeping

Most babies sleep a lot the first day or two after birth. But that doesn't last. After that you can count on getting little sleep at night. Infants don't really have "sleep problems", they just don't sleep when we want them to. Infants have a biological need to be fed and they awaken every few hours for food because they are hungry. Breast milk is quickly digested in small stomachs, so breastfed babies frequently wake up to eat during the night for several months. The safest position for most babies while sleeping is on their backs.

Swaddling

Wrapping your baby tightly helps the baby feel warm and secure. To swaddle your baby, lay the blanket in front of you in a diamond shape with a point at the top. Fold down the top point and lay your baby on his back on the blanket so that his head is above the edge you have just folded down. Take one of the side points of the blanket and pull it firmly over his chest, tucking it under his thighs. Next, bring the bottom point up over his feet and take the other side of the blanket over the baby in the opposite direction and tuck it under his thighs.