



## Bathing Your Baby

Your infant doesn't need much bathing if you wash the diaper area thoroughly during diaper changes. Two or three times a week during her first year is plenty. If she is bathed more frequently, it may dry out her skin.

### Sponge Baths

During her first week or two, until the stump of the umbilical cord falls off, your newborn should have only sponge baths. In a warm room, lay the baby anywhere that's flat and comfortable for both of you - a changing table, bed, floor or counter next to the sink will do. Pad hard surfaces with a blanket or fluffy towel. If the baby is on a surface above the floor, use a safety strap or keep one hand on her at all times to make sure she doesn't fall.

- Have a basin of water, a damp, double-rinsed (so there is no soap residue in it) washcloth, and a supply of mild baby soap within reach before you begin.
- Keep your baby wrapped in a towel, and expose only the parts of her body you are actively washing.
- Use the dampened cloth first without soap to wash her face, so you don't get soap into her eyes or mouth. Then dip it in the basin of soapy water before washing the remainder of her body and, finally, the diaper area.
- Pay special attention to creases under the arms, behind the ears, around the neck, and, especially with a girl, in the genital area.

### How to Give Your Baby a Bath

Once the umbilical area is healed, you can try placing your baby directly in the water. Her first baths should be as gentle and brief as possible. She will probably protest a little; if she seems miserable, you should go back to sponge baths for a week or two, then try the bath again. She will make it clear when she's ready. Most parents find it easiest to bathe a newborn in a bathinette, sink or plastic tub lined with a clean towel. If you're filling the basin from the tap, turn the cold water on first (and off last) to avoid scalding yourself or your child. In addition, make sure your hot water heater is set no higher than 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

- Fill the basin with 2 inches of water that feels warm, not hot, to the inside of your wrist or elbow. Once you've undressed your baby, place her in the water immediately so she doesn't get chilled.
- Use one of your hands to support her head and the other to guide her in, feet first. Speak to her encouragingly, and gently lower the rest of her body until she's in the tub. Most of her body and face should be well above

- the water level for safety, so you'll need to pour warm water over her body frequently to keep her warm.
- Use a soft cloth to wash her face and hair, shampooing once or twice a week. Massage her entire scalp gently, including the area over her fontanelles (soft spots). When you rinse the soap or shampoo from her head, cup your hand across her forehead so the suds run toward the sides, not into her eyes. Should you get some soap in her eyes, and she cries out in protest, simply take the wet washcloth and liberally wipe her eyes with plain, lukewarm water until any remains of the soap are gone, and she will open her eyes again. Wash the rest of her body from the top down.
  - When your infant comes out of the bath, baby towels with built-in hoods are the most effective way to keep her head warm when she's wet. Bathing a baby of any age is wet work, so you may want to wear a terry-cloth apron or hang a towel over your shoulder to keep you dry.

In the early months you may find it easiest to bathe your infant in the morning, when she's alert and the house is quiet and warm. By the time she graduates to the bathtub (usually when she's sitting up or outgrows the basin), you may want to shift to an evening schedule on the days she's bathed. The bath is a relaxing way to prepare her for sleep.

### **Bathing Supplies**

Make sure that supplies are at hand and the room is warm before undressing the baby. You'll need the same supplies that you used for sponge bathing but also a cup for rinsing with clear water. When your child has hair, you'll need baby shampoo too.

If you've forgotten something or need to answer the phone or door during the bath, you must take the baby with you, so keep a dry towel within reach. Never leave a baby alone in the bath, even for an instant.

If your baby enjoys her bath, give her some extra time to splash and explore the water. The more fun your child has in the bath, the less she'll be afraid of the water. As she gets older, the length of the bath will extend until most of it is taken up with play. Bathing should be a very relaxing and soothing experience, so don't rush unless she's unhappy.

Bath toys are not really needed for very young babies, as the stimulation of the water and washing is exciting enough. Once a baby is old enough for the bathtub; however, toys become invaluable. Containers, floating toys, even waterproof books make wonderful distractions as you cleanse your baby.

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