

Common Traits of the Newborn Infant

During the "transition period" from life inside the womb to the outside world most infants seem sleepy, they cry often, cough, sneeze, hiccough, spit up, and lose weight. You should expect these symptoms, and they shouldn't cause alarm.

Vomiting

Most babies spit up during the first three or four days of life, and some even become habitual "spitters." If your baby continues to gain weight and seems satisfied, the "spitting" shouldn't cause concern. Significant vomiting begins suddenly and represents most of each feeding, and should be examined by the physician.

Crying

Babies may cry because they are wet, cold, hot, hungry, in pain, sick, or without any apparent reason. When your baby cries, all of these possibilities must be considered.

If your baby cries inconsolably for more than 2 or 3 hours, contact your physician.

Weight Changes

An infant doesn't require much nourishment in the first few days of life. Most babies will stop losing weight by the sixth or seventh day of life, and they will regain the lost weight by the tenth to fourteenth day. The normal infant will gain about one-half pound per week during the first months of life, double his initial weight at five months, and triple it at one year.

Bowel Movements

The baby's face may become red, and he/she may strain and cry out while having a bowel movement. Bowel movements may occur after each feeding or your child may have a BM only once every four to five days.

General Care

Sponge baths are given until after the cord stump falls off and the umbilicus and circumcision have healed. Cords usually fall off between ten and twenty days of age. Keep the cord dry and out of the diaper. As the cord falls off, a

small amount of bleeding may occur. If excessive moisture or bleeding persists, please contact your doctor.

Nose Care

Nasal stuffiness is also common during the first several weeks of life. This can be helped somewhat by using a cool air evaporative humidifier in baby's room. Also, use of a bulb syringe may be helpful if mucous needs to be removed. Nasal saline drops may be used to keep the nasal passages moist during the daytime. Ask your physician how to use these devices properly.

Rectal Thermometer

A rectal thermometer should be used and kept separately for baby's use. The silver tip or bulb of the thermometer should be lubricated with petroleum jelly. Hold the baby's ankles firmly as you raise his/her legs to expose the rectum, and insert the thermometer into the rectum one-half inch, leaving in place for three minutes. Normal temperatures are usually between 98 to 100 degrees. Both thermometer and baby should be held firmly because the thermometer can be broken by a kicking baby. Currently, digital thermometers designed for rectal use are quick and accurate, and are generally safer than mercury-filled ones.

Vaginal Bleeding

The mother's hormones may cause a baby girl to have a small amount of vaginal bleeding, which is usually brief in duration (less than 1 week). The same hormones may cause breasts to enlarge in boys and girls. In time this swelling will subside, and no treatment is necessary. Massaging the breasts may be harmful.

Circumcision and Genitalia care

A small amount of ointment (petroleum jelly) should be applied to the circumcision site for the first few days. During the first few months of life the foreskin should be pulled back so that the end of the penis may be washed thoroughly. If males are uncircumcised, no special care of the penis is required.

Some boys are circumcised using a disposable plastic ring which is left around the end of the penis. No special care is required, and the ring will fall off by itself in five to seven days. For baby girls, separate the folds of the labia and gently cleanse the area from front to back with cotton, soap and water. Rinse and pat dry.

Skin

The newborn Infant has very thin, sensitive skin. It will appear blotchy, red, or even blue with exposure to heat or cold. Occasionally, one area of the baby's body may be red while another is blotchy blue--these changes are usually insignificant and do not require treatment. A red or white rash or red bumps may appear and disappear over the chest and abdomen. These skin conditions aren't serious, and they usually will clear up without treatment.

The skin doesn't require any routine applications of powder, oil or lotion. Drying, peeling skin often occurs during the first few days of life. If it looks as though the skin will bleed (usually at wrists or ankles) apply petroleum jelly or lotion.

Jaundice

On about the second or third day of life, most infants appear jaundiced (slightly yellow). When mild, this response is normal and usually clears after the first week. If jaundice happens before 24 hours of age, or if it involves the lower part of the chest or legs, contact your physician. Most jaundice should improve after day 7, and be gone by day 14. Call your physician if you have any concerns.

Bathing Baby

The room for bathing should be free of drafts and about 75 to 80 degrees F. All necessary equipment and a fresh set of baby's clothes should be at hand. Rings and other jewelry that may scratch baby should be removed. A sponge bath is given prior to healing of circumcision and umbilicus. After healing has taken place, baby is ready for a tub bath; the kitchen sink or bathroom sink with a folded towel in the bottom is adequate and convenient. If soap is used, it should be a baby soap, or mild hand soap such as Dove. To test water temperature, dip your elbow into it. Water temperature should be about body temperature (96 to 100 degrees). Use only about 3 inches of water to bathe baby.

Diapers and Diaper Rashes.

If using your own cloth diapers, use a mild detergent or soap, and bleach may be used but should be thoroughly rinsed from the diapers. Diaper services have excellent recommendations regarding their particular product, and their instructions should be followed. There are a variety of disposable diapers, and

choices should be made based on fit, comfort and dryness potential. *Please remember that disposable diapers pose a burden on our environment and landfills, and that diaper services can usually clean a day's worth of diapers using an amount of water equivalent to one flush of the toilet.*

Diaper rashes occur commonly. Treatment has two aims: 1) to protect the baby's skin and allow it to heal, and 2) to prevent rash. During a diaper rash, change diapers frequently with gentle cleansing of the skin to remove urine and stool. Rubber or plastic pants should be avoided. Diapers can be omitted whenever possible, allowing air to reach the skin. Diaper

Rash creams with Zinc (such as Desitin) may hasten resolution of the rash. Avoid baby wipes (even the non-scented types) during the first several weeks of life. Instead, use cotton balls with warm water to cleanse the baby's bottom.

Room and Clothing

In some instances, an infant may have a separate room in the house. The heating and cooling of this room is not critical, but extremes of temperature and direct drafts should be avoided. The temperature should be maintained around 70 degrees.

Adequate clothing can be defined as enough covering to prevent chilling or excessive warmth. An infant more often is too warm than too cold!

Isolation

If possible, don't expose the baby to any sick person, since he/she is more susceptible to illnesses during the first few months of life.

Travel

Your baby can travel whenever and however you can. You still must attend to his special requirements. Taking a supply of "home-town" water or purchase of prepared formula may be considered if the safety of a water supply is in doubt.

Feeding the Baby

Nutritional Requirements

Breast milk or commercially prepared formulas contain sufficient nutrients for your baby. The American Academy of Pediatrics advises breast milk,

preferably for the first year of life. If the baby is breast fed, he/she should receive additional Vitamin D and fluoride.

For breast fed infants, mothers should drink more than the usual quantity of liquids to assure adequate hydration and proper substrate for adequate milk supply. Her diet shouldn't include excessive amounts of any one food or a lot of spicy foods. Excessive amounts of alcohol (more than 1 ounce per day) should be avoided. Smoking should be avoided. Most medicines will be passed into the milk and may affect the baby. Your physician should be notified about any medications taken by a nursing mother. If nursing is interrupted for more than one to two feedings, a breast pump should be used to insure an adequate supply of milk when nursing is resumed.

For bottle fed infants, the formula should be mixed exactly as described on the formula can or bottle. Ready-to-feed formulas are available at higher cost. Consult your physician about which formula to use, and avoid switching from formula to formula without his/her knowledge. The amount of each feeding is simple: give the baby all he/she wants without forcing the feeding. A rigid schedule is usually impractical. Your baby will eventually develop his/her own schedule, usually feeding somewhere between every 2 and 4 hours. If your baby sleeps for more than 1 to 2 hours past the time for receiving his bottle during the day, he/she should be awakened and fed. The goal in a newborn should approach 7 to 8 feedings during the day.

Burping

After 5 minutes or so, or after 1 ounce and at the end of each feeding the baby should be held in an upright position to be burped. The infant may be held over the shoulder and gently patted on the back to bring up the air, or you may prefer to hold the baby upright on your lap supporting the jaw and chest with one hand and gently patting the back with the other.

Sterilization

Upon initially purchasing equipment for bottle feeding, all equipment should be boiled for 10 minutes (according to current recommendations) prior to use.

After the initial sterilization process, by using general cleanliness the sterilization procedure is probably not necessary if 1) public health approved water is used, and 2) if the formula is not returned to the refrigerator after initial use. Discard all unused formula after each feeding. Carefully wash all formula-making equipment in warm soapy water and rinse well, followed by dishwasher with hot water cycles. Store the cleared bottles, nipples and caps in an enclosed area.

Summary

Congratulations on your new arrival! If there are ever any concerns, please contact your physician, as she/he will be glad to assist you any way possible. There are several wonderful "baby books" which go into newborn issues in much more depth. One I recommend is What to Expect the First Year, which is abundant with information and is very reassuring. If you ever suspect that your newborn is ill, please contact your physician immediately, as even subtle signs of illness in a child less than 2 months may represent serious illness.

Thank You!

We are pleased to have seen you today, and realize that you could have chosen another physician or clinic for your care. We are here for you, and if we may help in any way please don't hesitate to ask.

We always greatly appreciate referrals to the practice, and we generally are growing because of our wonderful patient referrals. If you know of anyone needing a General Pediatric home, I would be delighted to meet and care for your referred families.

We look forward to hearing from you again, and thanks again for allowing us the opportunity to serve you.

Jeff Pickens MD

