

Introduction

What an exciting time! You have enjoyed nine months of watching your baby grow. You have probably gotten to see him in an ultrasound, and you have felt him move and kick. You have felt the highs and lows of pregnancy, and now you are holding that precious baby that you have long waited for.

In the hospital, nurses and doctors have helped you through those first days. But, now the time has come to take your baby home. This is a happy and exciting time for you as a new parent. But, it can also cause some anxiety when it hits that now you are responsible for your newborn.

When you take your baby home, you will begin to settle in and figure out routines. You will feed, bathe and care for him, working out all the details it takes to make your precious baby happy. This is also an important time to take care of yourself. Since your new baby will spend much of his first days at home eating and sleeping, you should also try to catch up on your sleep when you can and make sure you eat well.

Those Cries of Hunger

The one thing you can count on is that your baby will let you know when he is hungry. During the first few weeks of life, he will need to be fed during both the day and night. Babies who are breastfed require more frequent feedings than babies who are fed by bottle.

You might be confused at first about how often you should feed your baby and how much. You may receive advice from well-intended family and friends about feeding and sleeping schedules. The best rule of thumb, though, is to let your baby tell you when he is hungry and then feed him. This is called “demand feeding.” He will give you cues that he is ready to eat by turning his head toward you, sucking on his fingers or making sucking noises. If you are breastfeeding, he may “root” for your breast. Ultimately, he will cry if you miss his early cues.

Generally, newborns may want to be fed around every two hours. If you are breastfeeding, your baby may take about 15 minutes at each breast. He will let you know when he is done. Breastfed babies rarely overeat. If you are feeding by bottle, he may take about 2 to 3 ounces of formula at each feeding. You will know that your baby is getting enough to eat if he gains weight steadily, has regular, soft stools and a wet diaper 6 to 8 times per day. He will also appear happy and content.

A Pat on the Back

Your baby may swallow some air when you feed him. This can cause discomfort and make him fussy. If he becomes fussy after a feeding, you may need to burp him. If you notice that he is eating fast and gulping in air, you can burp him halfway through the feeding. Typically breastfed babies swallow less air. Babies do not always need to burp after a feeding, but you should always try.

There are a couple of ways to burp your baby, and you will have to figure out which works best for you. First, hold him up against your shoulder, supporting his head. Gently pat his back until you hear him burp. You can also sit him on your lap. Leaning him slightly forward and supporting his chest and head with one hand, gently rub or pat his back until he burps. Lastly, you can lay him on his tummy on your lap. Support his head in the crook of your arm and gently pat or rub his back until he burps.

Hiccups

Sometimes during or after eating, your baby may get the hiccups. This is very common in infants and rarely bothers them.

A hiccup is an unintentional spasm of the diaphragm, which is the muscle that helps him breathe in and out. Hiccups can start for no clear reason and disappear after a few minutes.

If he gets the hiccups during feeding, let him continue to eat. Sucking can actually stop them. If he gets the hiccups after a feeding, try burping him. If that doesn't work, don't despair. His hiccups will eventually go away.

What's the Scoop on Poop?

The color of your baby's stools can sometimes cause concern to a new parent. The color of the stool often depends on what he eats.

The first stool passed by a newborn is a greenish-black and is sticky. It is called meconium.

Breastfed newborns have stools that are a mustard color. Breast milk is more easily digested than formula and easier on your baby's digestive tract. Breastfed babies generally have 8-10 stools per day. After 6 weeks, he might not have a stool for 4-7 days.

Formula-fed babies have greenish-yellow stools usually about once a day. They are firmer than those of breastfed babies.

Taking Time With Your Baby

Spending time with your baby is such a fun time for you. Holding him, cuddling him and exploring his amazing newborn skills is so enjoyable. Take this time to get to know him. Look for the similarities he might share with you or other family members. This is such a great time of discovery.

The quiet time you spend with your baby helps him to feel loved and protected. At this early age, touching, holding and talking to him is very important for both of you. You will learn to understand his needs, and he will learn to understand his environment through you. You can never spoil him by holding him too much or by spending too much time with him. Remember, he needs you. Soon, you will wonder what you ever did before he came along!

Keeping Your Baby Healthy

In the first few minutes after your baby was born, he was given a health assessment and was weighed and measured. His heart rate, respiratory effort, muscle tone, reflex/irritability and color were checked and assigned a grade called the Apgar score. This score helps your doctor to know if your baby is healthy. During your stay at the hospital, the nurses monitored and tested him to ensure his health. There are some general areas that may cause you concern after you bring your baby home.

His skin may develop harmless rashes or blemishes known as "infant acne." This is normal for newborns. Tiny, flat, yellow or white spots on the nose and chin are called milia. They are caused by the secretions in the skin glands and usually go away in a few weeks. Most skin problems disappear on their own and don't require treatment.

Jaundice is a common blood condition occurring in over half of normal newborns. Immature kidneys and liver

prevent your baby from getting rid of a substance called bilirubin, which causes a yellow hue on the skin, gums and eyes. Your baby may be put under a special lamp at the hospital to help bring the color to normal. Jaundice usually clears up on its own in about ten days. More frequent feedings or short exposures to sunlight can also help to clear it up.

Newborn girls and boys might have swollen breasts and genital parts due to mom's hormones. Estrogen, which passes through their bodies, takes a while to disappear. When it does, the swelling will subside.

If your baby becomes listless due to a fever or excessive vomiting or diarrhea, call the doctor right away. If he develops a bad rash that won't clear up or sores and blisters, you may need medical help. You may also need to see the doctor if his jaundice won't clear up, or he is not feeding well. Pediatricians expect to receive lots of calls from new parents.

A Word About Colic

You may have a time when your precious little one will cry, and nothing you do will comfort him. When the crying lasts for longer than three hours a day, and there are no known health problems, it is called colic.

Colic usually occurs at the end of the day and when you have had the least sleep. It usually occurs at about the same time each day and stops after your baby is exhausted. It's a good idea to see your pediatrician to rule out any health problems. Colic usually improves within three to four months. Make sure during this time that you get lots of rest when you can.

Summary

It's exciting to bring your baby home for the first time. There are so many things to know and do to make your baby comfortable, happy and secure. Make sure you have a few good books and the support of family or friends to help you through this transition. Take every opportunity to get rest when your baby is sleeping. Schedule in some quiet time just for yourself.

References:

1. White-Traut, Rosemary, Taking Your Baby Home, Johnson & Johnson Pediatric Institute, L.L.C., 2000.; A Guide for First-Time Parents/ Looking at Your Newborn, Published by The Nemours Foundation, Reviewed by Elana Pearl Ben-Joseph, MD, January 2018. Accessed 5/9/2018 at <http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/guide-parents.html>.

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