

Meeting Your Newborn

The process of birth is hard on both the baby and the mother. However, it's completely normal for the baby to look a bit misshapen and it's often a good sign if your baby is crying loudly.

Newborns often have a fine hair called lanugo all over their body at the time of birth. This thin and short hair falls off in a few weeks. Rashes, blotches and tiny white spots often on the nose are typical for newborns. Most of these will disappear without any intervention, but your doctor will examine your child closely to make sure there are no issues. A baby will also have a clamped umbilical cord that will dry up and fall off after 10 to 21 days.

Leaving the Hospital

You must have an infant car seat properly installed before leaving the hospital. Always install car seats according to the manufacturer's instructions. Ensure that each seat is correct for your child's weight, size and age.

The nurses will dress your newborn during your stay at the hospital. They use simple onesies and a little hat to help your baby regulate body temperature. You may choose an outfit for your trip home, but it's wise to keep it simple.

Newborn Sleep

Newborns sleep 16 to 17 hours a day. While babies sleep much of a 24-hour period, they may only sleep one or two hours at a time. They don't have a regular sleep cycle until they are around six months old.

Crying

The only method of communication an infant has is to cry. When a child under the age of six months cries for more than a few moments, you will need to respond. They use crying to communicate that they're hungry, wet, uncomfortable or sick. You cannot spoil a child at this young age. You're only helping take care of something they cannot take care of themselves.

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 starts when babies are about three weeks old and gets worse between four to six weeks. Colic usually improves within three to four months. Make sure during this time that you get lots of rest when you can.

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 babies have stool that is like Dijon mustard with little white bits. Formulas stool is more yellow or tan and pasty in texture. In general, any earth tone color to stool is normal. If your newborn stool is white, light gray or red, take them to see the pediatrician immediately.

Newborn 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. After the first few days of life, a newborn should be wetting five to six diapers a day and soiling about two to five diapers.

Watch Out for Infections

Infections are another common complication for newborns. An infant normally contracts an infection during birth or through close proximity with sick visitors. It is important to watch for infections around the belly button, eyes and the circumcised foreskin. Signs of infection include a lack of appetite or weight gain, weak crying or increased irritability.

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!

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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