Newborn Care Instructions and Tips

• Feeding •

Whether you have chosen to breast or bottle feed it is important to feed your infant often in the first few weeks. Healthy full term infants will feed as often as every hour to three hours during the day, and may go as long as 5 hours at night if he or she is gaining weight well. Infants give cues when they are hungry which may include rooting (turning toward you with mouth open), sucking on hands, and crying. They often have days and nights confused, but this should improve after the first few weeks. Until then try to keep the room dark and quiet at night, and bright during the day.

Breast fed infants should feed for 15-20 minutes each breast until they improve enough to become efficient. Bottle fed infants should use the lowest flow nipple available for the brand bottle you have chosen, and gradually increase with age.

• Basic Infant Care •

Infant fingernails are paper thin, but very sharp. To prevent scratches it is best to file the nails for the first few months of life. Infant fingernail clippers often clip delicate infant skin and are best avoided until at least 6 months of age.

There is no need to bathe an infant everyday for the first few months of life. In fact, until the umbilical cord falls off (around 3 weeks of age), babies should be sponge bathed using either no soap at all or a sensitive skin non-fragrant soap. After the umbilical cord detaches it is fine to use a baby bath allowing the infant to sit in the water.

Umbilical cord care is simple. You may clean the cord with ethyl alcohol once daily if it appears dirty, but otherwise it needs no special care. Please call the office if you notice redness or swelling surrounding the umbilicus.

Please be certain to wash all the infant's clothes and linens in a fragrant free detergent prior to wear. Brand new clothes contain dyes that can be irritating to your baby’s skin.

Infant skin often peels or appears dry in the first few weeks of life. It is not necessary to use lotion at this time. The only areas that may need moisture are the wrists and tops of the ankles. These areas tend to crack, but this may be avoided with a small amount of petroleum jelly applied to these areas.

• SIDS Prevention •

The most important part of SIDS prevention is to place your infant on his or her back to sleep. This has been proven to decrease the risk of SIDS by 50%. Another way to prevent SIDS is to have your baby sleep in a crib or bassinet with only a crib sheet. No blankets, pillows, bumper pads, or toys should be permitted in the crib when the baby is sleeping. Many newborns sleep better when they are swaddled. It is fine to do this as long as they do not break the swaddle during their sleep. If you do not swaddle, just dress your infant a layer warmer than you would dress yourself in order to account for the lack of blanket at night. Never allow anyone to smoke around your infant. Ideal room temperature is 68-72 degrees. Do not allow your infant to get too warm, as this is also a risk factor. It is best not to co-sleep with your infant, but if you choose to do so, be sure that you do not use pillows or soft bedding in the bed with you. Do not smoke or drink alcohol prior to co-sleeping and be sure that your spouse or partner is aware that the infant is in the bed as well. Never co-sleep in a recliner, chair, or sofa. These are soft surfaces and the infant can become trapped between cushions. They are also at greater risk of falling and being injured from these surfaces.

• Newborn Jaundice •

Newborn jaundice is common in the first couple of weeks of life and is the yellow tint you may see in your baby’s skin. This is caused by a combination of dehydration and red blood cell turnover that a newborn’s liver is unable to process as quickly as an older child’s may. The best areas to see this yellow tint is in the whites of the eyes. Though this is more common in breastfed infants, it is important to continue breastfeeding unless otherwise notified by your doctor. Infants will rid the body of bilirubin which causes this jaundice through the liver and excrete it in bowel movements. (cont. on next page)
Therefore, in the first couple of weeks it is important that infants have a bowel movement every day, especially if they are jaundiced. Jaundice is only dangerous at very high levels. The upper threshold of normal levels changes with age, so you may be asked to return to the office more often in the first couple of weeks so that this may be monitored closely. The bilirubin is easily checked with a small amount of blood sent to the lab.

• Bowel Movements/ Urine Output •

Though infants should have at least one bowel movement per day for the first several days of life, over several weeks they tend to slow down significantly. They may begin as often as one bowel movement per feeding and then slow to as infrequent as one every five days. This pattern is still considered normal as long as the most recent bowel movement was soft. Breastfed infants classically have yellow, runny, seedy stools. Bottle fed infants will typically have a pasty texture. Normal colors include yellow, brown, and green. They often seem to strain or even cry out during a bowel movement. As long as the bowel movement remains soft this is normal and will improve with time.

Infants should have one wet diaper the first day of life, two the second, and three the third day and every day after. If your infant is not voiding this much, please notify the office so that hydration may be assessed.

• Illness •

Signs of illness can include but are not limited to refusal to eat, vomiting (not spit up but vomiting), or crying inconsolably. If you become concerned that your baby is becoming ill, take a rectal temperature. Any temp <97 or >100.4 rectally is a medical emergency in an infant <2 months. Please call the office immediately. This includes hours that the office is closed. Do not wait until the next day.

Until your infant is at least 2 months old, it is best to keep him or her away from large crowds in order to best prevent illness. Friends and family should wash their hands prior to touching or holding the baby. It is fine if you wish to take walks with your infant or eat out as long as you patron establishments during off peak hours.

• Colic •

Colic is most common in the evening hours from 3 weeks to 3 months of age. It usually involves a fussy period that resolves within a few hours. No one knows the cause of colic. It is perfectly appropriate to try gas drops if you wish. It is important to distinguish colic from reflux. Reflux is fussiness during or after feeding. You may see back arching or spit ups during this period as well. Reflux can happen during the day as well as night. If you believe your infant may be suffering with reflux it is important to make an appointment to have your infant evaluated.

• Normal Findings •

Spit- ups, hiccups, and sneezing are normal. Mild congestion is also common. Infants often have a breathing pattern in which they breathe rapidly and shallowly, pause for a few seconds, and then breathe slowly and deeply. This is a normal in newborns.

• Circumcision Care •

Circumcisions take around a week to heal. Use petroleum jelly during that time on the wound with every diaper change. A couple of days after the circumcision, you may begin to gently retract the skin from around the glans penis one time daily to prevent adhesions.

• Books And Websites We Recommend •

Caring for Your Baby and Young Child – Birth to Age 5. American Academy of Pediatrics. Steven Shelov, MD.

www.aap.org