



Caring for a Newborn

Caring for a newborn, especially your first, is one of life's biggest challenges. You and your partner will probably feel overwhelmed at the beginning—after all, there's so much to learn! But don't worry: you'll soon know your baby's needs and how to appease them. Here are five "crib notes" to get you started.

Picking Up and Holding Your Baby

There are several safe, comfortable ways to carry a baby. Whatever position you choose, always support your newborn's head and neck—a baby cannot hold his head up. Start by laying your baby on his back and scoop him up with two arms, one should support his bottom while the other rests comfortably against his head. Lay him across one arm with his head in the crook of your elbow and his bottom in your hand. Your other arm is now free to offer support and gentle caressing. You can also nestle the newborn at your neck. One hand should support the head and neck, and the other should support the baby's bottom.

Feeding Your Baby

Newborns usually eat every three to four hours; some feed as often as every two hours. Breastfed babies feed more frequently than bottle-fed infants because breast milk is easier to digest. As your baby grows, she will feed less frequently but her mealtimes will lengthen. Here's more food for thought on your newborn's eating habits. Your baby will let you know when she's full, usually by turning away from the nipple or bottle. Because healthy infants rarely become dehydrated, it's unnecessary to give them supplemental feedings of juice or water. In fact, the usual intake of breast milk or formula meets all of an infant's fluid needs for at least the first six months of life.

If you think your baby may be dehydrated, watch for these signs: lethargy; fewer than eight wet diapers a day; refusal to feed; and dry, sallow skin and mucous. In more serious cases, a sunken soft spot will appear on the top of the baby's head.

Burping Your Baby

Babies tend to swallow air during feeding, causing them to spit up or become fussy if they're not burped frequently. Try these three common burping methods.

Using one arm, hold your baby upright against your shoulder. Gently pat his back with your other hand. Sit the baby upright on your lap, support his chest and head and pat his back. Lay the baby on your lap face down, and gently pat your hand on his back.

Putting Your Baby to Bed

Only Rip Van Winkle sleeps more than infants. Some newborns sleep 10 hours a day, while others sleep as much as 21 hours daily. They usually mix up nights and days during the first several weeks. What's more, most babies do not sleep through the night until they are about four months old. To teach newborns that daytime is for playing and nighttime is for sleeping, try these parent-proven strategies:

- Avoid turning up the lights or prolonging nighttime diaper changes. Be sure to put your little one right back down after feeding and changing at night.
- If your newborn naps longer than three or four hours during the day, wake her up and play with her.
- Remember, when it comes to infants: too much sleep during the day will keep nighttime visitor Mr. Sandman away.
- Position your baby on a firm, flat mattress. Do not place soft, fluffy objects—pillows, stuffed animals, comforters, sheepskin—under your newborn while she sleeps. Though seemingly harmless, these plush products can increase the risk of death due to suffocation.

Calming a Crying Baby

People cry for a range of reasons: when they're sad, when they're happy, when they're filling out tax forms. With newborns, though, the source of their tears isn't always obvious. If you have changed and fed your baby and she is still crying, give these methods a try.

Burp your baby frequently, even if she shows no discomfort. If you nurse, burp her each time after you switch breasts. If you bottle-feed, burp her after she consumes two or three ounces of formula. Stop feeding if she's fussy or turns her head away from the nipple or bottle.

Rock or sway your baby in your arms from side to side. Singing, talking or playing soft music can also quell tears.

Take your little one for a ride in the car or stroller. Motion often has a calming effect on newborns.

Give your baby a warm bath. Keep these baths short—no more than a couple of minutes—and limit them to two or three times a week. Too many baths, especially during the winter months, can dry out a baby's sensitive skin and lead to chapping and diaper rash.

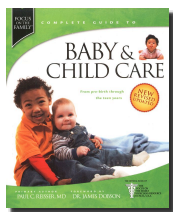
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For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb (Psalm 139:13).

I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him (1 Samuel 1:27).

Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him (Psalm 127:3).

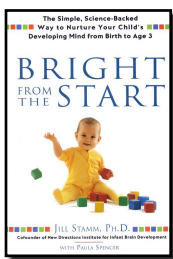
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Paul Reisser, MD
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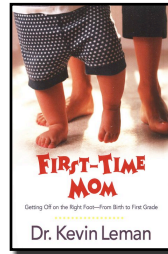
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Jill Stamm
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Dr. Kevin Leman
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