

Bathing & Diapering

By Michele A. Romano, MS, RN, CIMI, IBCLC, LCCE

THE DIRT ON BATHING

Many healthcare providers recommend sponge baths over tub baths until the umbilical cord stump has fallen off and the area has healed (within one to three weeks of life) and/or until a male circumcision has healed (which can take seven to ten days). That said, research suggests that it is not necessary to delay tub bathing. Your baby is less likely to get chilled when submerged, and the umbilical cord stump and penis heal just as quickly or even faster if baby is tub bathed.

Babies don't really get dirty, so it's fine to bathe a newborn two to three times a week and simply spot wash his face, neck and bottom in between.

Before you begin, remove any distractions, and turn on the answering machine. You might try warming towels by placing them in the dryer before bathing (and then rolling them so they stay warm until use). Remember to make bathtime fun! Sing, play and make the most of these special opportunities to get to know your baby.

SPONGE BATH KNOW-HOW

Fill a clean sink or basin with warm water. Have your basket of supplies (see box, right) and clean clothes nearby.

Place your baby on an open bath towel. Undress him, keeping his diaper on, and wrap him in the towel.

Wash your baby's face and ears using only warm water. Use a cotton ball dipped in plain water to wipe each eye from the inner to the outer corner. (Notify your healthcare provider of any odd drainage.)

Continue to wash him, exposing, washing and

then drying with the second towel each individual body part, working from tip to toes. As you wash each area, keep the rest of his body covered for warmth and security.

Remove his diaper and clean the area, including groin creases, using a separate washcloth with mild soap. Now turn the baby over. Washing his back will offer some tummy time.

If you have a helper, one of you can hold the baby over the sink while the other washes the baby's hair. Otherwise, securely hold your wrapped newborn with your hand at his neck, supporting his head. If this seems awkward, try laying the baby on the counter next to the sink and then sliding him so you can hold his head over the sink with one hand and wash with the other. Cup your hand to pour warm water on his scalp. Add a small amount of baby shampoo (open it before the bath so you don't have to fumble with it now) and use a gentle circular motion all over, including behind the ears. Use a cupped hand again to rinse and a second towel to dry. Dry, diaper, dress and cuddle.

Bathing & Diapering Prep

Fill a portable supply basket with:

- soft washcloths
- diapers
- cotton swabs
- cotton balls
- mild baby soap
- baby shampoo
- soft baby hairbrush
- mild baby wipes
- towels

This basket can be used for bathing, diapering and other care needs.

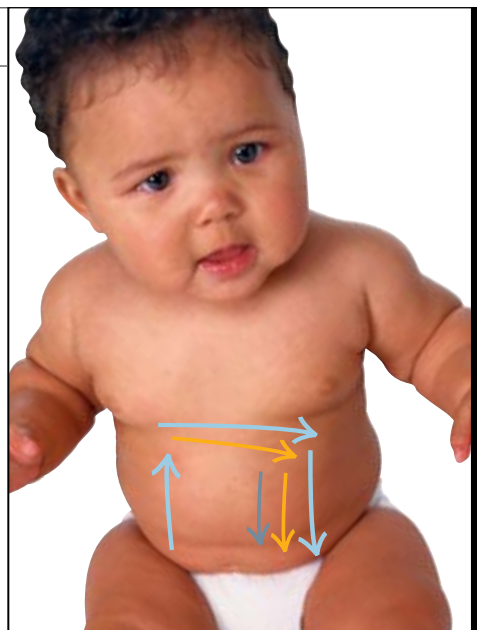
TUB BATH KNOW-HOW

Use a baby bathtub or a small sink. Place your supply basket, warmed towels and clean clothes within reach. Sing as you bathe and end with time for play.

Place your baby on an opened towel and remove clothes and diaper. Clean the diaper area with wipes or a washcloth dipped in soap and water.

Before putting baby in the tub wash his face with a clean washcloth and plain water.

(continue on back)



BATHS: NOT JUST FOR BATHING

Here are some games for during and at the end of the bath.

- Play "This Little Piggy" with toes or fingers.
- Wring the water from a washcloth onto your baby's tummy and watch the response.
- Use plastic cups to show him how to fill and pour once your baby is able to sit.
- Demonstrate a loving touch by drawing the letters "L," reversed "L" and "U" on your baby's tummy while saying, "I love you."
(See photo above.)

1 I **2** LOVE **3** YOU

UMBILICAL CORD CARE

The umbilical cord stump falls off between the first and third week of life. Keep the cord area dry; any drainage may be cleaned with a cotton swab dipped in water (alcohol or ointment are unnecessary). Dab the area gently with a dry cotton swab, and fold the diaper down to position it below the cord area.

Call your healthcare provider if the area around the cord, including the skin, is red or swollen, or if there is a foul-smelling discharge.

Add a small amount of bath soap to the washcloth and continue to wash the neck, arms, armpits, chest, tummy, legs, back and buttocks.

Wash his hair by wringing a wet washcloth over it. Apply a small amount of shampoo, and gently massage his scalp in a circular motion. Use the damp washcloth to clean behind his ears. Wring a wet washcloth onto his hair until the soap is gone; avoid splashing your baby's face.

Sing, play and enjoy this special time with your baby.

BATHTIME TIPS

- Never leave a baby unattended for even a moment on a surface of any height (table, counter, bed, changing table) or in a sink, tub or tub seat!
- For a tub bath, place your baby into the tub feet first. A rubber suction bath-safety mat or towel placed at the bottom of the sink or tub may make the surface less slippery.

DIAPERING KNOW-HOW

Gather your supply basket (see box, other side) and place your baby on the changing table (always use the restraining straps) or another mutually comfortable place. If diapering on the floor, place your baby on a folded bath towel or a soft pad.

Remove the soiled diaper by releasing the tabs. Gently swipe the diaper through your baby's groin, bringing the front to the back, and dispose.

Using a baby wipe or washcloth, clean from front to back toward your baby's buttocks. You may need to use several wipes.

Examine your baby's skin for diaper rash or irritation. Diaper changes with each feeding reduce these problems.

- Always cleanse the genital area from front to back to avoid bacterial infection.
- If you notice a dry, flaky area—cradle cap—on the scalp, gently massage in a small amount of cold-pressed vegetable oil and brush through before washing your baby's head. Call your healthcare provider if the flakes redden or persist.
- If your baby becomes upset or overwhelmed during the bath (fussy, arms and legs flailing), wrap him snugly or offer him his hand to suck. Comfort him by holding him close to your heart, and gently rock him. Continue with the bath once he's settled
- Make sure the room is not too cool so that your baby does not get chilled
- Lots of parents have discovered that it is convenient and less stressful to bathe with their babies. It's important to get into the tub and feel secure yourself before having your baby handed to you.

Consult your healthcare provider if a rash or irritation persists.

Dry the diaper area with a tissue and then place a clean diaper on your baby.

DIAPERING IS A SOCIAL TIME

Diaper changes are a great time to show your baby how much you love him.

Here's how:

- Use a clean diaper or small towel and play peekaboo. Peek over the top several times, then surprise your baby by peeking around one side.
- Blow raspberries on baby's tummy.
- Imitate some of the sounds your baby makes to have a little "conversation" with your baby in the tub.

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PENIS CARE

If you have questions regarding the necessity of male newborn circumcision, you'll find excellent information on www.medem.com and the American Academy of Pediatrics' web site, www.aap.org. What follows is the most up-to-date care information for both the circumcised and uncircumcised penis.

An uncircumcised penis does not require special care. Clean the diaper area with soap and water during each bath and with wipes or a dampened washcloth at each diaper change. Never forcibly retract the foreskin.

A circumcised penis

- Use clear water to clean the penis during healing.
- Your healthcare provider will advise you on any special diapering techniques, depending on the circumcision procedure.
- If you notice signs of infection, such as swelling or severe redness, or if the circumcision bleeds, call your baby's healthcare provider.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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