

Bathing Your Baby

How to give your baby a safe, gentle, thorough bath.

Bathing is part of the routine care of newborns. But baths worry many parents the first couple of times they try it.

Wet babies are slippery. And your baby may cry when given a bath, especially the first time.

But parents shouldn't worry. Bathing a baby can be done safely and rather easily as long as you take your time and take a few precautions.

In fact, bathing a baby is usually not much of a problem if you start with sponge baths and slowly work up to a full bath. Babies need to be cleaned. But infants do not usually need a full bath every day.

With a little practice, you will become more confident. And if you are prepared to get a little wet and allow a little time for water play, bath time can be a pleasant experience for you and your baby.

On Back

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You & Your Child



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Always test the water temperature first

Bath water should be warm, but not hot. Dip your elbow or wrist in the bath water to make sure the water is not hot.

Never leave your baby alone in the bath

Babies can drown in only a few inches of water. They should never be left unattended.

If the phone rings or you have to leave the bath for some other reason, always wrap your baby in a towel and take him or her with you.

Start with sponge baths

Many doctors recommend that you not give your baby a tub bath until your baby's navel has healed. That will probably take two weeks. And you can still give sponge baths for several months after that.

A sponge bath is only washing the parts of the baby's body that need to be kept clean every day – face, hands, and diaper area.

Use a water-proof cloth or pad for the sponge bath. You can place it on your lap, on a bed, or on a padded changing table.

- Start with the baby's head.
- Wipe each eye with a separate ball of cotton. Wipe from the corner of the eye toward the outside.
- With a washcloth, wipe around the face and neck, especially the mouth, nose, and ears.
- Be firm, but gentle. Moisten dried food or other material before wiping.
- Don't poke anything into your baby's ears, nose, or other places.
- To wash the scalp, reach under your baby's back and hold the head in your hand so that it tilts backward a bit. Squeeze a little water onto the scalp. Wipe in a circular motion.

Use soap sparingly

You probably only need to use a mild or special baby soap once or twice a week with an infant. Rinse twice to get all of the soap off. Pat dry.

Most of the rules are the same for tub baths

When you give a tub bath, follow the same basic washing procedures and safety rules that you did with a sponge bath.

But you will be placing your baby in the tub. So there are a few differences.

- Fill the tub with about two inches of warm – not hot – water.
- Place a towel or bath pad on the bottom of the tub to make it less slippery.
- When washing your baby's back, lean the child forward across your arm. Do not turn your baby over.
- Never let go of your baby.

How you hold your baby is important

- Keep the baby's body and face well above the water level for safety. And frequently pour warm water over the baby's body to keep him or her warm.
- Use one hand and reach behind your baby's neck, and gently grasp the top of the opposite shoulder with your thumb and the baby's armpit and ribs with your fingers.
- Let the baby's head rest against your wrist.
- Hold your baby's thigh with the other hand when you lift your baby into and out of the tub.

Allow for some play time

Bathing should be a relaxing and soothing experience. If your baby enjoys the bath, give him or her some extra time to splash and explore the water.

